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The Foreign Classical Romances

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FRONTISPIECES AND BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSON

The Fisher Maiden

TRANSLATED FROM
THE NORWEGIAN

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY ON
SCANDINAVIAN FICTION BY
HAMILTON WRIGHT MABIE

A FRONTISPIECE AND A
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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THE FISHER MAIDEN

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INTRODUCTION

"CAN you guess what I am dreaming about, and planning, and picturing to myself as something delightful?" wrote Ibsen to Georg Brandes from Christiania nine years ago: "The making of a home for myself near the Sound, between Copenhagen and Elsinore, on some free, open spot, whence I can see all the sea-going ships starting on and returning from their long voyages. That I can not do here. Here all the sounds are closed—in every acceptation of the word—and all the channels of intelligence are blocked. Oh, dear Brandes, it is not without its consequences that a man lives for twenty-seven years in the wider, emancipated and emancipating spiritual conditions of the great world. Up here, by the fiords, is my native land. But—but—but! where am I to find my homeland?" This cry of the spirit for companionship of aim, for a common and stimulating understanding with other men, has been heard many times by this generation;

but it comes laden with a peculiar pathos, charged with a more intense passion, from northern Europe and from Russia. The recent literature of Scandinavia is, almost without exception, a literature of protest. If Ibsen has spoken with more dramatic force than Björnson, Jacobsen, and Brandes, he has not framed his indictment with more energy of conviction or given it greater definiteness of statement. Readers of his "Letters" will remember his burning indignation when Prussia seized the Schleswig-Holstein provinces and dismembered Denmark without opposition from Norway and Sweden. "Norwegians and Swedes have a capital crime to atone for to your nation," he wrote to his faithful friend, the Danish publisher, Hegel.

But there were more general if less dramatic causes for his long expatriation; causes which were summed up in the general spiritual lethargy, the bondage to tradition, the deadening influence of the ideals of smug respectability, which gave the intellectual life of the Scandinavian countries stupefying monotony. If the house on the Sound had been built, and the free winds and tumultuous seas which separate Denmark from Sweden had cleared the air about it, Ibsen would not have es-

caped the suffocating air which oppressed him in Christiania. The battle for "the logic of free life," as Mr. La Farge has admirably phrased it, was even more bitter in Denmark than in Norway; and to-day it is impossible to sit in the library of Georg Brandes, on the quay facing the harbor in Copenhagen, without feeling that one is in an atmosphere of conflict. The fight has been won, but it has left its impress on the slender, nervous figure, the resolute features, the spirited, strongly poised head of the tireless and courageous critic, who has fought his way step by step to confidence and authority as well as to eminence. The invasion of modern thought, long resisted, was accomplished between 1870 and 1890, when the radical movement in religion, philosophy, science, education, literature, and art assumed revolutionary proportions. Like all reactions, its intensity was measured by the dull, uncomprehending resistance it encountered at the start; that it should, in some cases, have gone too far and become destructive was inevitable. It has changed the air of northern Europe and given the world a little group of writers whose individuality, intensity, and passion produce an impression so immediate and so defi-

nite as to make a final valuation of their work impossible for many years to come.

Of this stirring of the spirit of Scandinavia the work of Jens Peter Jacobsen is an authentic and deeply interesting record. In a period of territorial dismemberment, of national humiliation, of bitter political strife, he predicted, though he did not live to realize, the freedom and productiveness of a new epoch. Georg Brandes, the prophet of the new age, early recognized his genius, and speaks of him still with a note of deep feeling in his voice. Denmark is a small country, and Thisted, the little market-town in which the author of "Niels Lyhne" was born, on April 7, 1847, lies near the extreme northwestern coast of Jutland, at almost the farthest point from Copenhagen. The son of a well-to-do merchant, he was sent to school in his native village for six years; and then, after a year of study at home, went to Copenhagen to finish his preparation for the University, which he entered in 1868.

From his earliest boyhood he had shown a marked fondness for chemistry and the study of plants and flowers, and had become an experimental chemist and botanist. He began writing verses

while a student, but he chose botany as a profession; and in 1870 he made a study of the flora of several remote Danish islands. The congenial task of translating "The Origin of Species" and "The Descent of Man" gave deeper interest and more definite direction to his scientific taste, and sent him into the swamps to collect plants. His zeal outran his discretion, and exposure sowed the seeds of the pulmonary disease from which he died thirteen years later.

Cut off by illness from scientific activity, the ardent young student turned to literature. He had already tried his hand at story-writing, and the warm encouragement of Dr. Brandes gave his energy new direction. From 1873 to 1885 he was constantly fighting disease and heroically at work; seeking health in Italy; and finding, both at home and in the genial air of southern Europe, more themes than his diminishing strength could deal with. The first chapters of "Marie Grubbe," a historical romance, saw the light in the pages of "Det Nittende Aarhundrede," a monthly review devoted to the new movement represented by Dr. Brandes, Ibsen, Rydberg, Heyse, Zola, and other members of the group of writers whose work

was beginning to stir Europe. When this story was published in complete form in Copenhagen, in 1876, it secured immediate popularity, and speedily took its place at the head of Danish historical fiction. After long interruptions, due to increasing weakness, "Niels Lyhne" was finished in 1880. Two years later Jacobsen collected in a single volume six short stories, written at intervals during a period of ten years. This book, which bears the title of one of his earliest tales, "Mogens," is regarded as his most perfect work in point of delicacy and charm of style.

He died at Thisted on the 30th of April, 1885, waiting eagerly for the coming of the fragrant northern spring, and taking from his mother's hand, on the day of his death, the earliest cherry blossoms. "What a pity to break it off for me," were his last words.

When "Niels Lyhne" appeared Ibsen wrote to his friend Hegel: "Jacobsen's book is a fine work in every respect; I venture to say that it is one of the very best of its kind which has been written in our day." American readers will be impressed by its extreme modernity and by the pathos of the struggle for self-realization which it records. It

is, as Jacobsen called it, "a chronicle of youth"; touched with the idealism, passion, and sadness of youth. It is a study, not only of a temperament, but of a moment of transition; the portrait of a young man which brings out clearly the features of youth in every age, and of a free-thinker who resolutely strove to accept his creed in the great crises of life. American readers can hardly fail to note its deep inwardness of movement, in striking contrast to our objective stories of incident, action, and adventure; and its emphasis on the free expression of personality rather than on the application of the force of personality to some specific objective task.

These characteristics are equally distinct and significant in a story with which readers on this side the Atlantic have been familiar for many years. Björnson's "Fisher Maiden" was published at Copenhagen thirty-eight years ago, was translated into English two years later, and soon caught the attention of a considerable group of readers who are quick to appreciate the combination of rugged strength, poetic charm, and mobility of feeling which place the story among the most sympathetic and illuminating studies of the artistic

temperament. Until Ibsen became the rallying point of the new departure in dramatic writing, Björnson was, next after Hans Christian Andersen, the best known of the Scandinavian writers and the most widely read by Americans. He has been for five decades the incarnation of the old Norse spirit and the representative man of his race. While Ibsen expatriated himself, Björnson stayed resolutely at home. "In Norway will I live, in Norway will I lash and be lashed, in Norway will I sing and die," he wrote more than a quarter of a century ago; and he is still in Norway, and in the recent agitation which brought about the separation of that country from Sweden he towered above his contemporaries, the true leader of the people, whom he has devotedly loved while he lashed them, as he had lashed them because he loved them.

A sweeter nature than Ibsen, with a keener sympathy with men and a broader outlook on life, Björnson has fought the battle for the "logic of free life" in Norway not less vigorously than did the author of "An Enemy of the People"; and in some respects he has fought it more effectively. It is impossible to read "The Fisher Maiden" with-

out realizing how skilfully the inadequacy of the old-time orthodox view of life which kept Scandinavia in fetters to a rigid and barren interpretation of religion and ethics is driven home by sheer force of the facts of human nature dramatically stated.

Few writers have been so amply endowed in all ways as Björnstjerne Björnson. He is the embodiment of courage, genius, leadership. Broad-shouldered, massive in build, with a noble head and a commanding eye; a temperament all fire, passion, and tenderness; a knowledge of his country and his people, which has made him at once their leader and their interpreter to the world, the author of "The Fisher Maiden" has been a tower of strength in the fight for the emancipation of the human spirit in the Scandinavian world. Poet, novelist, dramatist, orator, political leader, Björnson has gathered into his intense and tireless life the most vital impulses of Norway.

Born in a country parsonage, in a rugged valley among the Dovre Mountains, on December 8, 1832, he was taken while a child into the heart of the noblest scenery in Norway, and fed his imagination on a landscape at once majestic and beau-

tiful. While a boy at the Latin school in Molde he inspired his playmates with his passion for poetry, history, the Sagas, folk-lore, and romantic tales. At seventeen he entered the University of Christiania, devoted himself to Danish literature, and fell under the fascination of the stage. A year under his father's roof brought him in close contact with the people and prepared him to be their poet, interpreter, and leader. He emancipated himself from the rigid and depressing pietism which lay like a shadow over the religious life of Norway; began his career as an author by writing dramatic criticism; visited Upsala and Copenhagen; and found himself, so to speak, by giving expression to his genius in both prose and verse.

His heart was with his people, and his first long story, "Synnöve Solbakken," revealed him as the master of a fresh, vivid, poetic style, and of a field of unsuspected richness of experience, emotion, and character. The story had the old Norse vigor and the old Norse poetry in a wholly original and wonderfully appealing combination; the bare simplicity of rustic life and the idyllic sweetness and charm of naive and unconscious feeling

gave it an interest and pathos which were irresistible.

Björnson had seen little of the world when he began to write, but he showed a high degree of artistic power from the beginning; and while his later work reveals wider relationships of thought and a fuller knowledge of life, it does not surpass the first stories in delicacy of feeling or charm of style. "Arne," which followed "Synnöve Solbakken," gave expression to the lyrical impulse still in the blood of the Norwegian peasant; the yearning for action, the vision of the world, the passion for complete self-realization. Dramas and poems poured from the prolific, seething mind of a man who had not only genius, but the passion for work; novels, contributions to periodical literature on religious, political, and literary topics came in a steady stream from his tireless hand. He was for a time director of a theatre, and for a number of years editor of a leading newspaper in Christiania. In 1880 he visited this country, and his return seems to have coincided with his appearance as an orator; a new form of expression through which he soon secured, and has ever since held, the attention of all Norway.

Introduction

In the long list of works that bear the name of this great-hearted man of genius none is a more authentic disclosure of his idealism, his poetic conception of life, his love of art, and his command of humor, pathos, sentiment, sympathy, and deep feeling than "The Fisher Maiden"—a fresh, free, deep-seeing interpretation of the temptations, struggles, joys, sorrows, pains, and exaltations of the artistic temperament.

HAMILTON W. MABIE.

LIFE OF BJÖRNSON

READERS of the weird dramatic poem "Peer Gynt," by Björnson's great compatriot, Henrik Ibsen, may remember certain scenes taking place in the Dovre Mountains. It was in this region that on the 8th of December, 1832, the author of "The Fisher Maiden" first saw the light. His father was then holding a Lutheran pastorate at Kvikne, a small town twenty miles south of the famous fjord of Trondhjem, whence, however, he was transferred to Naesset, in Romsdalen, a few years after our author's birth. At the age of twelve, the boy was sent to the Molde high school, and at seventeen to the University of Christiania, which institution he left in 1832, without having distinguished himself in any way. However, "the itch of scribbling" did not tarry long in worrying his fingers, for after quitting the university he soon struck out into journalism; he joined the forces of the Christiania "Aftenbladet" as dra-

matic critic and reviewer, wrote, as well, for the "Morgenbladet," and acted as correspondent for some provincial papers.

As a composer of fiction, Björnson made his public bow with a few brief rural sketches, among which may be mentioned "Thrond" and the "Dun Horse." His first novel, printed in the year 1857, before he was twenty-five—which was entitled "Synnöve Solbakken"—won rapid popularity throughout Europe. The most important novels to follow were: "Arne" (1858), "A Happy Boy" (1860), "The Fisher Maiden" (1868), "The Bridal March" (1872). All these described Norwegian types amid Norwegian surroundings; they betokened a determination to break loose from the literary dominance of Denmark, and to set up a genuinely national standard. In later years there were published the romances of "Captain Manzana," an Italian story, and "In God's Way." Though not a poet in the sense that he regarded poetry as his prime vocation, Björnson scattered among the pages of his novels lyrics and ballads of no mean quality.

One of his great ambitions was to reform Norway's drama. He began by planning several pieces

which should have for the main interest the peculiar characteristics of the Norse peasantry, with which Björnson was certainly familiar, if anybody was. But naturally enough, he found that peasant life was much restricted in its range of activities, and he therefore turned to the world at large for his types and subjects. Fundamentally aggressive by disposition, he frequently selected sociological "problems." Thus, in view of the corruption of the press, he wrote "The Editor," while "The Glove" raised the issue of sexual impurity being condoned in men and condemned in women. Further plays to attract at least momentary attention were "Leonarda," "The Failure," "Laboremus," the historical trilogy "King Sigurd," and the satirical drama "The New System." "Beyond Human Power," a study of religious emotion, achieved considerable success at its first production, in 1899. But it can not be said that Björnstjerne Björnson has, like his renowned countryman, the author of "Ghosts" and "A Doll's House" and "Peer Gynt," secured himself a place among the world's chief modern writers for the stage.

Björnson has always been a political agitator of fervent spirit and leading influence, and to

his strong efforts the recent separation of Norway from Sweden may partly be accounted due. He was conspicuously active in politics between 1864 and 1874, when he carried on his work with pen and voice, delivering energetic addresses in all parts of the country. During this period he bought the radical organ the "Folkebladet"—which he had already been editing for some time—in order to obtain a fully free utterance for his convictions. For the last twenty years he has led the life of a country gentleman at his estate of Aulestad, though paying frequent visits to continental capitals, where his linguistic abilities—he speaks, besides the Scandinavian tongues, French, German, Italian, and English—stand him in good stead. Two dates may be added: 1858, the year of his marriage to Karoline Reimers, and 1880, the occasion of his lecturing tour in the United States of America.

THE FISHER MAIDEN

CHAPTER I

GUNLAUG OF THE HILL

WHEN the herring has fixed upon any place along the coast for its constant and regular haunt, a town grows up there bit by bit, if it is otherwise a likely place. Towns such as these may not only be said to have been actually cast up by the sea, but even still, at some distance off, look like bits of wreckage or timber that the waves have washed ashore; or like upturned boats, under which the fishermen have crept for shelter against the stormy night. Draw nearer, and you will see in what a casual fashion the town has been built: crags lie in the midst of thoroughfares; the sea divides the hamlet into three or four parts; and the streets curve and wind about at will.

But one property is possessed by all these towns alike: they have shelter in the harbors for the largest ships; within them, the water is smooth as in a basin; and therefore these inlets are very welcome

to vessels that come with sails torn, and bulwarks shattered, scudding away from the high seas to seek for breathing-time.

In such townlets all is stillness: everything that is a source of noise is relegated to the quays, where the villagers' boats lie fast, and ships load and unload.

In our little town the only street runs along the quays, facing which are white and red-painted houses, one or two stories high, with walls not touching one another, but with bright strips of garden in between, the whole forming a long and broad road, on which you get the scent of whatever happens to be on the quays, if the wind is blowing from the sea.

All is quiet here—not from fear of the policeman, for as a rule there is none, but from fear of what people say, for everybody in the place is known to everybody else. Should you walk down the street, you must give a greeting at every window you pass, and the old dame sitting at it will pleasantly greet you in return. Exchange a greeting, too, with every one you meet; for all these quiet folk go about their business considering what is the most fitting conduct for the world in general

and for themselves in particular, and any one who oversteps the limits proper to his rank and station in life loses his good name; for not alone is *he* known, but his father and his grandfather before him; and immediately folks set themselves to find out if, at any previous time, any tendency toward impropriety has been manifested in the family.

To our quiet town there came many years ago a man much respected by all, Peter Olsen, whose Christian name was usually abridged to Per. He had come from the country, where he had earned his livelihood as a pedler and fiddler, and he opened a shop in the town for his old customers, selling bread and brandy in addition to his pedler's wares. You might hear him walking up and down in the back room behind the shop, playing jigs and wedding marches. Every time, as he passed the door, he peeped through the glass panels, and if he caught sight of a customer coming, he finished up his tune with a flourish and went into the shop. His business prospered, he married, and had a son, whom he called after himself, naming him, however, not "Per," but "Peter."

Little Peter was to be what Per felt he himself was not—a cultivated man; and with this end in

view the boy was sent to the Latin School, the institution for the children of the higher classes.

The lads who ought to have been his comrades beat him home from their games, because he was the son of Per Olsen; and Per Olsen beat him back again to them, because it was impossible for him to be educated otherwise. In consequence, little Peter, finding himself isolated at school, grew so idle, and by degrees so completely inured to the whole affair, that his father could strike neither tear nor smile out of him; so Per gave up the beating process and put him into the shop.

Judge of his surprise when he saw the lad serve every customer with exactly what he asked for, never giving a grain too much, nor ever himself eating so much as a currant; weighing, counting, or invoicing with immovable countenance; never talking, if he could avoid so doing; very slow in all his movements, but unimpeachable in his exactitude.

Then the father's hope sprang up anew, and he sent him, in a fishing-boat, to Hamburg, that he might go into the Commercial Institute and learn good manners.

After eight months' absence—long enough, in

all conscience—he returned, provided with six new suits, which, when he landed, he wore one over the other: "for what one wears and walks in," as the saying is, "pays not custom-house duty."

Next day, when he was seen in the street, he had lost some of his bulk, but otherwise he looked much the same. He walked stiff and straight, holding his hands close by his sides; he saluted with a sudden jerk, bowing as if deprived of the use of his joints, and immediately becoming quite stiff again. He was politeness personified, but silent in his manners, and, after a fashion, shy.

His name he no longer wrote "Olsen," but "Ohlsen," which gave the town wag a chance for the following display of wit:

Question. "How far did Peter Olsen get in Hamburg?"

Answer. "As far as the letter H."

He had had thoughts of calling himself "Pedro," but he suffered so much annoyance for the sake of an H that he gave up that idea, and wrote himself "P. Ohlsen."

He did much to extend his father's business, and when only in his two-and-twentieth year he married a red-handed shopkeeper's lass, that he might

have some one to look after the household: for the father had just become a widower, and a wife is more trustworthy than a housekeeper. Just a year after their marriage she bore him a son, who, within a week of his birth, was named Pedro.

Now that worthy Per Olsen was a grandfather he felt an inner call to become old; so he handed the business over to his son, took his seat on a bench in the open air, and smoked twist out of a short pipe. And when one day he began to grow somewhat weary of his life, he uttered a wish that he might soon die, and this wish of his was as quietly granted as all the rest of his desires had been.

Now, just as the son Peter had inherited one side exclusively of his father's powers, viz., his business aptitude, so the grandson Pedro seems to have been sole heir to the other—his musical faculties. It was long before he learned to read, but he very soon knew how to sing. He played the flute so well that it could not escape notice. He was weak of sight and yielding in disposition. All this, however, only vexed the father, who wanted the boy to possess his own punctilious accuracy; so if ever he neglected anything, he was not scolded and beaten, as his father had been, but pinched. This was done

in a quiet, an affable, wellnigh a polite manner; but it was done on the very smallest provocation. Every night as the mother undressed him she counted and kissed the blue and yellow marks, but she made no resistance, for she herself knew what it was to be pinched. For every rent in his clothes —which were those his father had brought from Hamburg, cut down and altered for the son's use —for every smudge on his school-books, she had to bear the blame. Hence all day long it was "Don't do that, Pedro!" "Take care, Pedro!" "Mind what you're doing, Pedro!" till the boy grew afraid of his father and weary of his mother. Among his schoolmates he came to no particular harm, because he always fell a-crying, begging them not to hurt his clothes: they nicknamed him "Touchwood," and troubled themselves no more about him. He was like a sickly, featherless duckling, ever limping along behind the rest of the brood, and sneaking quickly off with any little bit he could steal for himself: nobody shared with him, and so he shared with nobody.

But he soon found out that it was very different for him among the poor children of the town; they had far more patience with him, because he was

better off than themselves. A tall, strongly-built lass, who was queen of the whole crew, took a liking to him. He was never tired of looking at her. She had raven black hair that curled about her head and was never combed save by her fingers, eyes of perfect blue beneath her narrow forehead, and an expression that betokened single-hearted determination. She was always actively engaged, whether in sport or in work, going about in summer-time with arms and legs bare, and face tanned by the sun, while in winter her clothing was such as others wear in summer. Her father was a pilot and fisherman: she flourished about selling his fish, holding his boat still against wind and tide, and—when he was away acting as pilot—did the fishing alone. No one who saw her could help turning round and taking another look at her, she seemed such a picture of self-reliance.

Her name was Gunlaug, but she was called "The Fisher Maiden," a name she accepted as a title proper to her rank. In all games she was always to be found on the weaker side; she seemed to need somebody to care for, so now she took charge of this sickly boy. In her boat he might blow his flute, which was forbidden him at home, because

it was believed to divert his thoughts from his lessons. She used to row him out on the fjord; she began to take him out with her on longer fishing expeditions; and, before long, let him accompany her on her night tours as well.

On such occasions they rowed off in the silent summer twilight as the sun sank to rest, and he would play his flute, or listen to her as she told him all the tales that she knew of mermen and of monsters, of strange adventures, foreign lands, and black men, just as the sailors had told them to her. She shared her food with him just as she did her knowledge, and he partook of both alike without making any return; for he had neither eatables to bring with him from home, nor fancy from school. They rowed till the sun went down behind the snow-capped hills, and then anchored off some craggy islet, where they landed and made a fire; that is to say, she collected sticks and branches, he sat and looked on. She brought one of her father's seaman's jackets and a blanket in the boat with her, and in these she wrapped him round. She looked after the fire and he went to sleep, while she kept herself awake by singing bits of psalms and songs; she sang in a clear firm voice until he fell asleep,

and then she sang in a lower tone. When the sun rose again across the water, darting pale yellow rays over the mountain-tops to herald his approach, she would wake him. The woods still stood in blackness, and the country still lay darkened, but began to be reddish and glowing until the ridge of hills shone clear, and every color gleamed forth bright and distinct. Then they dragged the boat into the water again, and quickly it shot through the waves before the fresh morning breeze, and soon it lay moored among the other fishing-boats.

When the winter came, and the expeditions came to an end, he used to visit her at her home. He would often sit looking at her as she worked, but neither he nor she spoke much; it was as if they were sitting together waiting for summer. But alas! when it came, their hopes were destined to come to naught, for Gunlaug's father died, and she left the town, while the boy, at his schoolmaster's advice, was put into the shop. There he stood beside his mother, for little by little the father had become the color of the groats he was always weighing out, and was at last obliged to keep to his bed in the back room; yet he still

wished to take part in all that went on and to know what sales each of them made. He would act as if he did not hear, until he got them near enough, and then pinch them. At length the oil ran quite dry in this little lamp one night, and the light flickered out. The wife wept, hardly knowing why she did so, but the son had not a tear to squeeze forth. Having money enough to live on, they gave up the business, removed everything that might have reminded them of it, and made the shop into a sitting-room; there the mother sat by the window and knitted stockings, while Pedro sat in the room on the other side of the passage and blew his flute. But as soon as the summer came, he bought a little light sailing-boat, bent his course to the rocky islet, and lay where Gunlaug had lain.

One day, as he lay there among the heather, he saw a boat steering straight for him; it brought up close by his resting-place, and out stepped Gunlaug. She had not altered at all, save that she was full-grown, and taller than other women; but as her eyes fell upon him, she turned aside a little and slackened her pace, for it had never occurred to her that he was now a man.

The thin, mealy face was unknown to her, for it

was no longer ailing and delicate-looking; it was dull and heavy; but as he looked at her, his eyes were lighted up as if by the light of his former dreams, and as she advanced, for every step she came it seemed as if a year fell from him, and when she stood by him he had sprung up and stood laughing and talking like a boy. Beneath the old face lay the visage of a child; he had got older, it is true, but he had not grown up.

Such as he was, it was just such a child she was seeking, though now that she had found him again, she hardly knew what more she would have. She laughed and blushed. Involuntarily he seemed to feel a sort of power within him; it was the first time in his life, and at that instant he was actually handsome; it lasted perhaps little more than a moment, but in that moment she was entirely captivated.

Gunlaug was one of those natures that can only love whatever is weak, whatever they have borne in their arms. She had meant to stay in the town two days—she remained two months.

In those two months he developed more than in all the rest of his life. He was so far aroused from his dreamy apathy as to form plans for the future:

he decided that he would go away and learn music! But when he talked of this to her one day, she turned pale, and said, "Yes; but first we must be married!"

He looked at her, and she looked steadfastly back at him; both blushed red as fire; and then, "What will people say to that?" said he.

It had never occurred to Gunlaug that his wishes could be other than hers, just because her wishes had till then never been other than his. But now it flashed upon her that, deep down in his heart, he had never for an instant had any intention of sharing anything with her, except what *she* gave him. In that instant it stood revealed to her that it had been so in all their intercourse. She had begun by pitying, and ended by loving, the being she herself had fostered. Ah! if she had only exercised a moment's self-control at the moment of this discovery! For he saw her anger blazing up, and in fear he cried out, "Yes, I will marry you!" She heard him; but her anger at her own blindness and his littleness, at her own shame and his cowardice, seethed up with burning speed to boiling point, and never did a love that began in

childhood in the evening sunshine, that had been rocked on the billows beneath the rays of the moon and accompanied by the melody of the flute and of soft singing, come to a more pitiable ending. She grasped him with both her hands, she raised him from the ground, and struck him with all the passion of her heart; then she rowed straight back to the town, and, never swerving, went away over the hills.

He had sailed out a youth deep in love, and on his way to achieve manhood; he returned an old man, for whom manhood had never been. His life had but one memory, and that he had in his folly thrown away: one spot only on earth did he care for, and thither no longer durst he go. Brooding over his own misery and how it had come upon him, his new-born vigor sank as in a quagmire, never to emerge again. The little town boys soon noticed his strange bearing, and began to plague him; and as he was an obscure person to his fellow-townsmen, who knew neither what he lived on nor how, it fell out that he found no one to defend him. Before long he no longer dared to venture out—at any rate, not in the public thoroughfares. His whole existence became a warfare with the

boys, who were, perhaps, of the same use as flies are in the heat of summer; without them he would have sunk into complete torpor.

Nine years later Gunlaug came back to the town just as unexpectedly as she had left it. She was accompanied by a little girl about eight years of age, who looked just as Gunlaug used to in former days, save that she was more delicate in her features and bearing, and had a look about her as if she had stepped out of a dream. Gunlaug had been married, it was said; she had inherited some money, and had come back to the town to open an inn for seamen.

She managed her house in such a way that merchants and skippers came to her to hire sailors, and sailors came to her to get hired. Besides this, all the town ordered fish of her. And though she never took a shilling for her services as agent, she wielded despotically the power her position gave her. Certainly she was the most influential person in the town, though she was a woman, and a woman, too, who never left her own house. She was known as "Fish-Gunlaug," or "Gunlaug of the Hill"; while the title of "The Fisher Maiden" descended to her little daughter, and this child, whose more

popular designation was "The Fisher Girl," was always to be found skipping about at the head of the small boys of the town.

Her history it is which we are about to tell. She had something of her mother's strong nature, and she had occasion to use it.

CHAPTER II

THE FISHER MAIDEN'S CHILDHOOD

THE many pretty gardens of the town, now clad in their second and third blossoms, were fragrant after the rain. The sun was sinking to rest behind the everlasting mountains of snow and the whole heavens far around seemed all on fire, making even the snow-peaks give back a subdued reflection. The nearer mountains stood in the shadow, but were bright, notwithstanding, with many-hued autumnal foliage. The rocky islets with their dense woods, coming one after another in the middle of the fjord, like a stream of boats rowing in, afforded a still stronger display of color, for they were not so far off. The sea was still as glass: a big ship was slowly being towed in. People were sitting about on the wooden steps before their doors, where the rose-bushes grew thick about them: they were talking to one another from door to door, running over to each other's dwellings, or

exchanging greetings with the passers-by, who were on their way to the long, leafy lanes beyond the town. Here and there a piano might be heard through an open window: save that, no sound broke upon their talk. The last gleams of the setting sun over the sea seemed to add to the feeling of utter calm.

All of a sudden there arose a sound in the middle of the town as if it were being stormed. Boys were screaming, girls crying, other boys hurrahing, old women scolding and shrieking out orders; the policeman's big dog was barking his loudest, and every dog in the town barked in answer. Nobody that heard it could stop indoors. So great was the uproar that the magistrate himself turned on his threshold, and was heard to say, "Why, there must be something the matter!"

"What is it?" was the constant question of those who came from the lanes to those on the steps.

"Dear me! what can it be?" every one was asking now, whenever anybody came from the middle of the town.

But the town lies in a half-moon along a gently-curving bay, and so it was a good while before those at each end had heard the answer:

Oh! it's only the Fisher Girl!"

That venturesome spirit, bold in the protection of a redoubtable mother, and sure of help from every seaman in the town—for such service always got them a free dram from Gunlaug—had put herself at the head of her horde of small boys, and fallen upon a great apple tree in Pedro Ohlsen's garden. The plan of assault was as follows:

Certain of the boys were to lure Pedro to the front of the house by making his rose-bush beat against his window; at the same time, one of the others was to shake the apple tree, which stood in the midst of the garden, and the rest were to throw the apples over the fence in all directions, not to steal them—far from it!—but just for fun.

This ingenious plan had that very evening been hatched behind Pedro's garden; but as luck would have it, Pedro himself happened to be sitting on the other side of the fence, and heard every word!

Somewhat before the appointed time, he got the town policeman—a tippling fellow—and his big dog into his back parlor, where he gave both of them refreshment. When the Fisher Maiden's curly black hair was seen above the palings, and a number of little faces peeped over on every side,

Pedro let the young scamps in front of the house dash his rose-bushes against the window-panes to their heart's content, while he quietly waited in the room at the back of the house. But when they had all gathered in perfect silence round the tree, and the Fisher Maiden, with bare arms and scratched legs, had climbed up to shake it, the garden door suddenly sprang open, and Pedro and the policeman dashed out with sticks in their hands and the huge dog close behind them!

A scream of terror rose from among the boys. A lot of little girls, who were innocently playing "catch" on the other side of the fence, thought that somebody was being murdered in the garden, and began crying in the most heartrending way. The boys who had escaped shouted "Hurrah!" those who were still struggling over the fence screamed under the blows of the cudgels; and, to complete the confusion, there arose from the depths certain old women—they always do when boys begin to shriek—and joined in the chorus. Pedro and the policeman were dismayed themselves at the uproar, and tried to still the old women. Meanwhile, the boys took to their heels, and the dog, which they feared most, dashed over the fence after them;

that was *his* part of the game! And now the screams, the boys, the girls, and the dog flew like wildfire all over the town.

All this time, the ringleader had been sitting quite still up in the tree, thinking that nobody had noticed her; crouching up at the very top, she could follow through the leaves the course of the fray. But as soon as the policeman had in desperation gone out to the old women, and Pedro Ohlsen was alone in the garden, he came right under the tree, looked up, and shouted:

"Come down with you at once, you rascal!"

Not a sound from the tree.

"Will you come down, I say? I know you're up there!"

Still unbroken silence.

"I shall go and get my gun and shoot you! I will!" and he made a movement as if to go.

"Boo-hoo-hoo!" came a sound from the tree.

"Yes, you may well begin to squall! You shall get a whole barrelful of shot in you, you shall!"

"Oo-hoo, oo-hoo!" cried a voice like an owl's; "I am so frightened!"

"Ah! it's you, you little devil, is it? You're the

worst limb of mischief of the whole lot; but I've got you now!"

"Oh! dear, good, kind sir! I'll never do it again!" And at the same moment she flung a rotten apple clean in his face, and a peal of laughter accompanied it.

The apple burst all over him, and while he was wiping it off, she slipped down from the tree, and was wriggling over the palings before he could get near her. She would have got right off in safety, if she had not been so afraid of his being close behind her that she slipped back in her haste.

As soon as he touched her, she gave a scream—a scream so piercing, loud, thrilling, and shrill, that he was quite taken aback, and let go his hold. At her signal of distress, people began to gather round the fence. She heard this, and plucked up courage straightway.

"Let me go!" she threatened, "or I'll tell mother!" and her face was now all ablaze with passion.

Then he knew that look, and shouted wildly: "Your mother! Who *is* your mother?"

"Gunlaug, Gunlaug of the Hill, Fish-Gunlaug,"

reiterated the girl in triumph, for she saw he was frightened.

Nearsighted as he was, he had never seen the child till now, and was the only person in the town who did not know who she was; he did not even know that Gunlaug was in the town.

"What is your name?" he cried, like one possessed.

"Petra!" came the answer, in still higher tones.

"Petra!" cried Pedro—and turned and dashed into the house as if he had spoken with the Fiend.

Now, the paleness of fear is very like that of anger: Petra thought he had gone for his gun; terror seized her—already she felt the shots pursuing her. The garden gate had at that moment been burst open from the outside, and she rushed off through it, with her black hair streaming wild behind her, her eyes flashing fire, and the dog, whom she met, following and baying after her. Thus she burst upon her mother, who was coming from the kitchen with a bowl of soup, and down went the girl, with the soup all over her and the floor.

"Drat the girl!" from Gunlaug.

But, lying there in the spilled soup, she cried

out: "He's coming to shoot me, mother! he's coming to shoot me!"

"Shoot you! Who's going to shoot you, you little imp?"

"He—he—Pedro Ohlsen—we were taking his apples." She never dared tell aught but the truth.

"Whom are you talking of, child?"

"Of Pedro Ohlsen; he's after me with a big gun! he's coming to shoot me!"

"Pedro Ohlsen!" shrieked the mother; and then she laughed, and seemed somehow to have grown taller.

The child began to whimper and tried to make off; but the mother sprang upon her, with her white teeth shining as if for prey, and, gripping her by the shoulders, stopped her from going.

"Did you say who you were?"

"Yes, yes, yes, yes!" cried the child, holding up her hands entreatingly.

Then the mother drew herself up to her full height:

"So he has got to know at last! Well, what did he say?"

"He ran in for his gun; he was going to shoot me!"

"He shoot you!" laughed Gunlaug, in huge scorn; but the child, in great terror, and all bespattered with the soup, had crept away into the corner, and was standing drying her clothes and shedding tears.

"If ever you go near him again," said the mother, coming up to her once more, seizing her and shaking her, "or talk to him, or listen to what he says, may God help both him and you! Tell him that from me!" she added threateningly, as the child did not at once answer.

"Yes, yes, yes, yes!"

"Tell—him—that—from—me!" she repeated once more, in a lower tone, as she walked away, stopping to nod her head at every word.

The child washed herself, changed her clothes, and went and sat out on the steps in her Sunday frock. But when she thought of the peril she had been in, her tears again began to fall.

"What are you weeping for, childie?" asked a voice, more kindly than any she had ever heard before.

She looked up; there stood before her a gracefully built, intellectual looking man with spectacles. She stood up at once, for it was Hans

Oedegaard, a young man in whose presence every one in the town was wont to assume an attitude of respect.

"What are you weeping for, childie?" repeated the voice.

She looked up at him, and said that she and "some other boys" had been trying to get the apples in Pedro Ohlsen's garden; but Pedro and the policeman had come after them, and—" But she called to mind that her mother had shaken her faith in the shooting, so she dared not tell that part of the story—she gave a long deep sigh to make up for it.

"Is it possible," cried he, "that a child of your age could think of committing so great a sin?"

Petra stared at him; she knew well enough that it was a sin, but she had always been used to being told so by hearing herself called, "You imp of the devil! You black-haired little fiend!" Now, somehow, she felt ashamed.

"How is it you don't go to school and learn God's Commandments to us about what is good and what is evil?"

She stood tugging at her frock, as she made shift

to answer that her mother did not want her to go to school.

"You can not even read, I suppose?" he said.

"Yes," replied she, she could read.

He took out a little book and gave it her. She opened it, turned it over, and then looked at the cover.

"I can't read such fine print," she said.

But he would not let her off so, and straightway she became most marvelously stupid: her eyes and lips drooped, and all her limbs seemed to hang loose.

"T-h-e the, L-o-r-d Lord, G-o-d God, the Lord God, s-a-i-d said, the Lord God said to M—M—M—"

"Good gracious!" he broke in, "you can't even read! And you ten or eleven years old! Wouldn't you be glad to be able to read?"

She managed to jerk out that she would be glad enough.

"Come with me, then; we must set to work at once."

She moved away a little, to look into the house.

"Yes, go and tell your mother about it," he said; and just then Gunlaug passed the door. Seeing

the child talking with a stranger, she came out on to the flagstones.

"He wants to teach me to read, mother," said the child, looking at her with doubtful eyes.

The mother made no answer, but set both her arms akimbo, and looked at Oedegaard.

"Your child is very ignorant," said he. "You can not answer it before God or man for letting her go on so."

"Who are you?" returned Gunlaug, sharply.

"Hans Oedegaard, the son of your priest."

Her face cleared a little, for she had heard nothing but good of him.

"When I was at home before," he went on, "I noticed this child. To-day my attention has been called to her afresh. She must no longer accustom herself to doing only what is bad."

"What is that to you?" said the mother's face plainly enough, but he continued quietly:

"Surely you would like her to learn something?"

"No!"

A slight flush passed over his face as he asked:

"Why not?"

"Are folks any the better for learning?" She

had had only one experience with it, but she stuck fast to that.

"I am astonished that any one can ask such a question."

"Yes, of course; I know you are. I know people are none the better for it;" and she moved to the steps, to put an end to such ridiculous talk.

But he planted himself right in her way.

"Here is a duty," said he, "which you *shall* not pass by. You are a most injudicious mother."

Gunlaug measured him from head to foot.

"Who has told you," said she, "what I am?"

"You—you yourself; just now; or else you must have seen that your child was going on the way to ruin."

Gunlaug turned, and her eye met his; she saw he was in earnest in what he had said, and she began to feel afraid of him. She had always had to do with seamen and tradesfolk; talk such as his she had never heard.

"What do you want to do with my child?" she asked.

"Teach her what is right for her soul's welfare, and see what is to be made of her."

"My child shall be just what I want."

"No, indeed, she shan't! She shall be what God wants."

Gunlaug was at a loss what to answer. She drew nearer to him and said:

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean," he replied, "she ought to learn whatever her powers allow; for God has given them her for that."

Gunlaug now drew close up to him.

"Am I not to decide what is best for her—I, the child's mother?" she asked, as if really wishing to be informed.

"That you shall; but you must act on the advice of those who know better than you. You must do the Lord's will."

Gunlaug stood still for a moment.

"What if she learns too much?" she said at last. "A poor woman's child?" she added, looking tenderly at her daughter.

"If she learns too much for her own rank, she will thereby have attained another," he said.

She grasped his meaning at once, and, looking more and more fondly at her child, she said, as if to herself:

"That is dangerous."

"That is not the question," he returned gently; "the question is, what is right?"

A strange expression came into her keen eyes; she looked at him piercingly, but there was so much earnestness in his voice, his words, and his face, that Gunlaug felt herself conquered. She went up to the child, and laid her hands on her head, but she spoke not a word.

"I shall read with her from now till the time when she is confirmed," he said, hoping to make things easier for Gunlaug. "I wish to take charge of the child."

"And do you want to take her away from me?"

He hesitated, and looked at her inquiringly.

"Of course you know far better than I," she said, speaking with difficulty; "but if it hadn't been for what you said about the Lord—" Here she stopped. She had been smoothing down her daughter's hair, and now she took off her own kerchief and bound it round Petra's neck. Thus, in no other way did she say the child was to go with him; but she hastened back into the house, as if she could not bear to see it.

Oedegaard began suddenly to feel afraid of what, in his youthful zeal, he had done. The

child, for her part, felt afraid of him, for he was the first person who had ever got the best of her mother. And so, with mutual fears, they went to their first lesson.

Day by day, as it seemed to him, her cleverness and knowledge increased; and it often happened that their conversation seemed, of its own accord, to take one peculiar bent. He would bring before her eyes characters from the Bible or from history, in such a way as to point out to her the call that God had given them. He would tell her of Saul leading his wild life, or of the young David tending his father's flocks, till Samuel came and laid on him the hands of the Lord. But greatest of all was the call when the Lord walked upon earth, tarried among the fisher-folk, and called them to His work. And the humble fishermen arose and followed after Him—to suffering—yea, even to death; for the feeling of the holy call bears men up through all tribulation.

The thought of this took such hold of her that she could not refrain from asking him about her own "call." He looked steadfastly at her; she grew red beneath his gaze; and then he answered that through work every man finds out his vocation,

that that might be insignificant and unimportant, but that it existed for every one. Then a great zeal came upon her; it drove her to work with all her might; it entered into her games, and it made her wan and thin.

Strange longings for adventure came over her. Oh! to cut short her hair, dress like a boy, and go out to take part in the struggle! But when one day her teacher told her that her hair would be so pretty if only she would take a little care of it, she got fond of her long tresses, and for their sake sacrificed her chance of a heroine's fame. After this, to be a girl became a more precious thing to her than ever, and henceforth her work went peacefully on, with the ever-changing dreams of girlhood floating about her.

CHAPTER III

OEDEGAARD

In his youth Hans Oedegaard's father had wandered away from his native parish of Bergen, and by the aid of people who had taken to him, he had become a learned man and an able preacher. He was, moreover, a man of authority in deed even more than in word, for he was a deep and resolute thinker. This man who had, by his tough, stout will overcome all the difficulties of his life, was fated to receive a check where least he expected it, and where he felt it most.

He had three daughters and one son. His son Hans was the brightest ornament of his school, and it was the father's daily joy to help him with his lessons. Hans had a friend who, by his aid, kept up with him, and who loved him above all else on earth, save only his mother. The two boys went together to school, and together to the university; together they passed the two preliminary exami-

nations, and now they were about to enter on their professional studies together. One day, after finishing their accustomed portion of reading, as they were merrily going downstairs, Hans in mere joyfulness of heart sprang upon his comrade's back; the latter slipped, and a few days later lay dead. The dying youth begged his mother—a widow, now about to lose her only child—to grant him the wish of his heart, and let Hans fill her son's place. The mother scarce outlived her son, leaving, by her will, all her property, which was considerable, to Hans Oedegaard.

It was many months ere Hans was at all himself again after this terrible event. A long journey abroad so far restored him as to enable him to go on with his theological studies till he was ready for holy orders; but nothing could induce him to make use of them.

The whole hope of the father's life had been to see his son his helper with his flock, and now it was not possible to get him even to ascend the pulpit; he gave to all entreaty the constant answer—he felt no call. It was a bitter disappointment to the father, and it made him years and years older. He had settled down to his work late in life; he

was now quite an old man, and all his work had been done with all his strength and with this one object ever before him. And now in the same house dwelt the son, in his stately suite of rooms above, while down below the father worked strenuously in his little study, with the lamp that lighted up the night of his old age beside him. He neither could nor would take the help of a stranger after his disappointment at home, nor would he follow his son's advice and give up work; therefore he knew no rest, summer or winter. But every year the son's journey abroad grew longer. When he was at home he associated with no one, save that, in more or less silence, he dined daily at his father's table. But any one who talked to him always met with such clearness of judgment and zeal for truth that it was difficult to argue against him. He was never at church, but he gave more than half his income for benevolent purposes, and always with most careful injunctions as to its use.

Charity on such a large scale was a thing so different from the little town's narrow ideas that it overwhelmed everybody. Besides this, his reserve, his constant journeyings abroad, and the fear all felt of talking with him, made him, as may easily

be supposed, a mysterious sort of being in their eyes, and they gave him credit, not only for the common sense and ability he possessed, but for all possible talents as well. When this man, then, condescended to take the "Fisher Girl" into his daily care, she rose vastly in their estimation.

One after another of them—chiefly women—now tried to look after her as well. She came to him one day, dressed out in all the colors of the rainbow; she had put all her finery on, thinking that now she surely must be looking as he liked to see her, for he always wanted her to look neat. But he no sooner saw her than he forbade her ever to take anything from anybody again. He called her vain and silly; he said that she only gave her mind to foolish objects, and cared for nothing but frivolity. When she came next morning with eyes red with weeping, he took her with him for a walk beyond the town. He told her the story of David; for it was his constant habit to take now one, now another, well-known character and make him live again for her. First he painted him to her as he was in his youth, when he walked fair and strong and in untroubled faith, so that he had earned a

triumphal procession even before he was of man's age. He was a shepherd, yet called to be king; he dwelt in caves and holes, yet in the end he built Jerusalem. In beauteous attire he sat and played to the sick Saul, but when he himself was a king, and sick, he was clad in the sackcloth of repentance as he sat singing and playing to himself. When he had done his great work, he sought ease in sin; but the warning and the punishment fell upon him, and again he was as a child. David, who could upraise the Lord's chosen people by his songs of praise, himself lay crushed at the Lord's feet. When was he best to see—when, crowned with victory, he danced to his own music before the ark, or when in his own chamber he implored grace at the hand of the Chastiser?

That night Petra had a dream which she never forgot all her life after. She was going up, it seemed to her, in a triumphal procession, mounted on a white horse; but at the same time she was in rags, and dancing in front of it.

Some time after this, as she was sitting one evening at the edge of the wood beyond the town, reading her lesson-books, Pedro Ohlsen, who since that day in the garden had been constantly drawing

nearer and nearer to her, walked close by her, and, with a curious smile, whispered, "Good-evening." Although more than a year had gone by, her mother's command to her about talking with him was so strongly impressed on her mind that she did not answer him. Nevertheless, day after day went by, and ever with the same greeting. At last she grew to expect him, if he did not come.

Presently he began to ask some little question or other as he walked by, and before long he managed to get her to talk too. After one such talk he let a silver daler slip down into her lap, and then dashed off, happy in his success. Now, it was against her mother's order to talk to him; against Oedegaard's to take gifts of any one. The first she had gradually been drawn into transgressing; and this was brought vividly to her mind now that it had led her to do the same to the other. To get rid of the money, she got hold of another girl and treated her to sweets; but, in spite of their best efforts, it was not possible for them to eat more than four kroners' worth. As soon as she had spent the money, she grew angry with herself for not having given it back instead. The remaining

krone, as it lay in her pocket, seemed as if it were burning a hole in her clothes: she snatched it out and flung it into the sea.

But not by such means was she quit of the money; her thoughts were branded with it. She felt she might once again be free if she were to confess; but her mother's terrible wrath and Oedegaard's heartfelt belief in her seemed each in its own way too dreadful to be borne. The mother noticed no change, but Oedegaard saw at once that something was weighing on her and making her wretched. He gently asked her what was the matter, and when, instead of answering, she burst into tears, he thought they must be in want at home, and gave her a ten-daler bill. Now that he, in spite of her sin against him, should give her money—and money, too, that she could openly give her mother, for it was money honestly got—made such a powerful impression on her, that she felt as if free from guilt again, and gave herself up to an ecstasy of joy. She took his hand with both hers, she thanked him, she laughed, she danced up and down, and rapturous delight beamed through her tears as she looked at him as a dog looks at its master when it is allowed to go out with him. He scarcely knew

her: she who generally sat lost in what he was saying, now was in the ascendent over him. For the first time he saw a strong, wild nature rise up before him; for the first time life's fountain splashed forth its red stream over him, and he started back blood-hot. But she darted through the door and up the hill on her way home. She put down the money on the griddle in front of her mother, and threw her arms round her neck.

"Who gave you this money?" said the mother, all aflame in a moment.

"Oedegaard, mother, Oedegaard! He is the finest man in the world!"

"What am I to do with it?"

"I don't know— Oh, mother dear, if you knew—" and she threw her arms round her mother's neck again, for now she felt she could and she would tell her all.

But Gunlaug impatiently shook herself free.

"Would you have me take alms?" she cried. Take this money back to him! If you've let him think that we were in want, you've cheated him!"

"But mother—"

"Take his money back to him on the spot, I tell

you, or else I'll go myself and throw it back at him —at him, who has stolen my child from me!"

The mother's lips were trembling as she said these last words. Petra moved away, more and more pale, softly opened the door and slowly walked out of the house.

Before she well knew it, the ten-daler bill was torn to atoms between her fingers; when she realized this, she broke forth into a torrent of angry indignation against her mother. But Oedegaard must know nothing of this! Or rather, yes, he should know all! There must be nothing kept back from him!

A moment later she was standing in his room telling him that her mother would not take the money, and that she, in her anger at having to come back with it, had torn the bill in pieces. She was going on to tell him the rest, but he looked at her coldly, and bade her go home again, recommending her at the same time to obey her mother, even when it was difficult for her. This sounded very strange to her, for she knew that he at any rate did not do what his father wanted him of all things to do. On her way home, her grief and passion burst forth again, and just at that moment

she met Pedro Ohlsen. She had purposely kept out of his way all this time, for he was the cause of all her woes.

"Where have you been?" he asked, walking along by her side. "Is anything the matter with you?"

There was such a tempest in her heart that it might cast her where it would. Carried away by her feelings, she could not see why her mother should have forbidden her to have anything to do with just this one person: it was only another whim of hers, of course, thought she.

"Shall I tell you what I've been doing?" he said, in an entreating tone, as she stopped. "I've bought you a sailboat; I thought you might like to sail;" and he gave a laugh.

His kindness, which had something in it of a humble appeal for friendship, was just the thing to touch her at that moment; she nodded; and he with busy, eager air, whispered to her to go out beyond the town into the lane to the right, until she got to the big yellow boathouse: he would come and fetch her from behind it, and no one would see it there. Off she went, and presently he came for her, all happiness and good behavior,

and as if he were a big boy. They sailed about for a while in the light breeze; then they lay to by an island, made the boat fast, and got out. He had all sorts of nice things with him, which he gave her with trembling joy; then taking out his flute, he began to play. For a while she forgot her sorrow as she watched his joy; and as the feeling of pity that comes of watching the happiness of the weak grew upon her, she began to take a liking to him.

After that day she had a new and constant secret to keep from her mother, so that before long she kept her mother from knowing about any of her doings. Gunlaug asked no questions; she trusted people entirely, until she entirely mistrusted them. But from that day Petra had a thing to keep secret from Oedegaard as well; for she took many a present from Pedro Ohlsen. Nor did Oedegaard ask any questions, but he grew day by day more formal and distant with her at her studies. So Petra was now divided among three persons: she never spoke to one about either of the others, for she had some special secret to guard from each.

Meanwhile she was now grown up, though she

herself did not yet know it. One day Oedegaard told her that it was time for her to be confirmed.

This information filled her with great unrest; for she knew that with confirmation her lessons would come to an end, and what was to happen then?

Her mother had a little attic arranged for her, for, after confirmation, Petra was to have a room of her own: the incessant hammering and nailing were painful reminders to her. Oedegaard noticed that she was growing more and more silent, and sometimes, too, he saw that she had been weeping. Religious instruction made great impression under these circumstances, though Oedegaard with tender care avoided everything that might touch her too deeply. It was for this reason that some fortnight before confirmation he closed his lesson with the simple remark that that was their last. He meant the last with *himself;* for he intended to look after her; but others, and not he, were to be her teachers. She, however, sat motionless in her chair; the blood left her cheeks; her eyes were never moved from his face. Touched by her emotion, he involuntarily sought to give his reason.

"Of course all girls are not grown up by confirmation time; but you feel, I'm sure, that you are."

If she had been standing in the full light of a great fire, she could not have been redder than she was at these words. Her bosom heaved, her eyes looked timidly about her and were full of tears, and Oedegaard, still more perplexed, hastily went on:

"Would you like to go on all the same, though?"

The moment he had said it, he saw what it was that he had proposed, and that it was a wrong thing to have done; he would have tried to withdraw it, but already she had raised her eyes to his, and though she did not say "Yes" with her lips, yet it could not have been said more clearly. To ease his own conscience by giving himself an excuse, he asked her:

"Isn't there anything in especial that you would like to take up? Anything that—" and he bent toward her, "anything that you feel a call for, Petra?"

"No!" she answered, so sharply that he reddened, and, growing cooler, fell back into the meditations which for long years had filled his thoughts, and which her unexpected answer had now reawakened.

That there was something remarkable in the

girl he had never doubted since the time when she was a child, and he had been used to seeing her march about singing at the head of the town's street boys. But the longer he taught her, the less he understood the natural bent of her talents and powers. There was evidence of them in every movement: whatever she happened to be thinking, to be wanting, that her whole body and spirit portrayed, with all the fulness of her strength and the glory of her beauty. Yet in words—still more in writing—her thoughts were mere childishness. She seemed to be nothing but wayward imagination, though, to be sure, Oedegaard put most of that down to restlessness. She was very diligent in her work, but always her object seemed to be to get through her lessons, rather than to learn anything; what there would be on the next page was what her thoughts were busy with. She had religious emotions, but, as the priest put it, "no turn for a religious life."

Oedegaard was often in perplexity as to her future. Once more he seemed to be at the starting-point, and his thoughts flew of their own accord to the stone steps where he had first taken her into his care; once more he seemed to hear the mother's

sharp tones as she laid the responsibility on him, because he had named the Lord. He walked up and down the room several times, and then, pulling himself together, spoke:

"I am going abroad," he said, with a certain amount of hesitation; "I have asked my sisters to look after you meanwhile, and when I come back again we'll see what more is to be done. Farewell! we shall see one another again before I go!"

He walked away so quickly into the next room that she did not have time even to take his hand.

When she saw him again it was where she least expected it, and that was in the pulpit just before her, as she stood up in the church among the flock of maidens for confirmation. This so excited her that her thoughts were far, far from the holy rite for which he had prepared her in humility and prayer.

Yes, but Oedegaard's old father's thoughts were straying too: he paused and gazed long at his son, as he stepped forth to begin the ceremony.

Petra was destined to another surprise that morning; for somewhat lower down sat Pedro Ohlsen, in stiff, new clothes; he stretched out his head so as to be able to look over the heads of the

boys at her among the flock of girls! He ducked down again at once; but she saw him again and again thrust up his head with its scant covering of hair, and bob down again. It distracted her thoughts; she tried not to see, but could not help looking; and just at the moment when all the others were deeply affected—many of them, indeed, in tears—Petra was shocked to see Pedro standing up with his mouth and eyes wide open and motionless, and his whole body apparently paralyzed. He seemed to have no power either to sit down or go away, for opposite him stood Gunlaug, in all her majestic height. Petra shuddered to see her mother, for her face was white as the altar-cloth. Her black curly hair seemed to be rising up, her eyes to have a power to thrust him off, as if they were saying: "Away from her! what have *you* to do with her?" At length he sank down on his seat beneath her gaze, and very soon afterward sneaked out of the church.

Presently Petra began to grow calmer, and the longer she listened the more earnest she grew. And when now she turned back from the altar, after giving her confirmation-promise, and looked through her tears at Oedegaard, who stood near-

est to all her good resolves, she promised in her heart that she would never turn his trust to shame. He seemed to be praying for the same, as his steady eye shone upon her; but when she got back to her place and sought him out again, he was gone. She went home at once with her mother, who, on the way, let fall:

"Well, now *my* part with you's done; now let the Lord do His!"

When they had finished dinner—mother and daughter had dined alone together—Gunlaug said, as she rose:

"Well, now we'll go and see him—the parson's son, I mean. I don't know what's the good of what he's been doing, but anyway he's meant well. Put on your things again, child."

The road to the church, which these two had often walked together, lay above the town, and they had never before been seen together in the street through the town; indeed, the mother had scarcely been there since she had come back. Now she turned down into the street at once; she wanted to walk through the whole length of it—she with her grown-up daughter!

On the afternoon of Confirmation Sunday the

folks in such a little town are all to be seen in the streets, either on their way from house to house with congratulations, or walking up and down just to see and be seen. At every step there is a pause and a greeting, a hand-shake and a kindly wish; the poorer children, clad in the half-worn garments of the richer ones, walk about to show themselves and their gratitude; the sailors of the place, dressed in outlandish finery and with hats aslant, and the town fops—the clerks—go about in troops, greeting and being greeted; the half-grown-up lads from the Latin school, each arm-in-arm with his best friend in the world, saunter about, uttering their half-grown-up criticisms; but to-day all in their hearts must perforce feel themselves inferior to Yngve Vold, the lion of the town, the young merchant, the richest man in the place, who has just come back from Spain, all ready and able to take over his mother's huge fish business.

With a yellow hat over his yellow curls he flashed through the streets, and the young girls and lads just confirmed were wellnigh forgotten; for all turned to welcome him, and he talked with every one, laughed at every one. Up and down the street you could see his bright hair and hat,

and hear his bright laugh. When Petra and her mother came out, he was the first they stumbled upon, and, as if they really had done so, he started back from Petra, whom he no longer knew.

She had grown tall; not so tall as her mother, but still taller than most women: she was graceful in her carriage, refined, and yet spirited-looking: her mother, and yet not her mother, in constant alternation. Even the young merchant, who walked along near them, could no longer draw the passer-by's eyes on himself now: these two, mother and daughter together, were a rarer sight. They walked briskly, greeting no one, for they were seldom addressed by any but seamen; and they quickened their pace as they walked back down the street, for they heard that Oedegaard had just left home for the steamer, which was about to start.

Petra hurried most; she must, yes, she *must* bid him farewell and thank him before he went. Oh, it was too bad of him to go away from her like that! She looked at none of all the many that looked at her; it was the smoke from the steamer rising above the houses that she saw, and it seemed to her to be moving away. When they got to the

quay the steamer was just putting off, and it was with a sob in her throat that she hastened away to the lanes leading to the beach, jumping along rather than walking, her mother striding after her. As it had taken the steamer some time to clear the harbor, she was early enough to be able to jump down on the beach, spring upon a rock, and wave her pocket-handkerchief vigorously. The mother stood back in the lane and would not go down. Petra waved higher and higher, but no one on the steamer waved back.

Then she could hold out no longer, and, for weeping's sake, must needs go home by the road above the town. Her mother walked along with her in utter silence. The attic that Gunlaug had given her that day, and in which for the first time she had slept the night before, and dressed herself so joyously in her new clothes that morning, received her that evening all in tears, and with no eyes for aught around her. She refused to go downstairs, where guests and seamen had assembled. She took off her confirmation garb and sat on the bed till nightfall; and it seemed to her that the dreariest thing in the whole world was to be grown up.

CHAPTER IV

A CHAIN OF GOLD

ONE day, soon after her confirmation, Petra went over to Oedegaard's sisters', but she perceived at once that her going there was a mistake; for the priest went about his work so that she never saw him, and his daughters—all older than Hans—were cold and reserved. They contented themselves with giving her scant directions from their brother as to what she should do. She was to go and spend the whole morning in taking part in the housekeeping work of a house beyond the town, and the afternoon in the sewing-school; she was to sleep and have her morning and evening meal at her own home. She did as she was bid, and liked it well enough so long as it was new; but after a while, and especially when summer came on, she began to grow tired of it, for at that time of the year she had been in the habit of spending the whole day in the woods, reading her books,

and with all her heart she longed for them again, as she longed for Oedegaard and as she longed for some one to talk to. The consequence was that she took such companionship as she could find.

Now, it happened that about this time there came to the sewing-school a young girl named Lise Light—at least Lise, but not really Light, for Light was the name of a young cadet who had been at home at Christmas-time, and had got engaged to her on the ice, when she was only a schoolgirl. Lise declared she was ready to die on the spot if there was a word of truth in it, and shed tears if any one mentioned it; meanwhile all the girls called her Lise Light. This emotional little Lise Light wept often and often laughed; but whether she was weeping or whether she was laughing her thoughts were always running on love.

The whole school was soon filled by a swarm of new and wonderful thoughts. If a hand was stretched out for the reel, the hand was the wooer, and the reel said "Yes," or "No." The needle was plighted to the thread, and the thread was offering itself up, stitch after stitch, for its cruel lover's sake. Did any girl prick herself, she was pouring forth her heart's blood; did any exchange her

needle, she was fickle-hearted. If two girls were seen whispering together, it must be because there was some secret confidence between them; straightway two more began to whisper, and then another two; each had her own bosom friend, and there were a thousand mysteries in the air. Such a state of things could not last.

One afternoon, toward twilight, Petra was standing outside the house with a big handkerchief over her head, for there was a fine drizzling sort of rain about. She was looking in the direction of a young seaman, who was standing in the alley whistling a waltz; and though she was holding the ends of the handkerchief tight under her chin with both hands, so that only mouth and nose could be seen, the seaman, with cheerful readiness, discovered that she was looking for him, and quickly sprang to where she stood.

"I say, Gunnar," she said, "will you come for a walk?"

"Why, it's raining!"

"Pooh! that's nothing!" she answered; and they made their way to a cottage farther up the hill.

"Buy me some cakes," said she; "those with cream on them, I mean."

"Why, you're always wanting cakes!"

"Those with cream, I say!" she repeated; and he presently came out again with them. She stretched out her hand from beneath her wrap, drew them in, and went along eating. When they had got right above the town, she handed him a bit of cake, and said:

"Listen, Gunnar! We two have always stuck to one another, haven't we? I have always liked you better than all the other boys. You believe that, don't you? It's true, I can tell you! And now that you're second mate, and will soon get to command a ship, you ought to get engaged, I think, Gunnar. But aren't you going to eat your cake?"

"No; I've just taken a chew."

"Well, what do you say to what I said?"

"Oh, there's no hurry about that."

"No hurry! why, you're going to sail the day after to-morrow!"

"Yes; but I'm coming back again, I suppose, am I not?"

"Yes, of course; but it's very uncertain whether I shall have the opportunity then, for you don't know where I may be by that time."

"What! am I to be engaged to *you* then?"

"Yes, of course, Gunnar; you ought to have seen that. But you're always so stupid at seeing things, and that's why you're only a sailor."

"Oh, I don't mind that; it's good enough to be a sailor."

"That's true, because your mother owns a ship. But what do you say now? You *are* such a slow coach!"

"Why, what *can* I say?"

"What *can* you say? Ha, ha, ha! Perhaps you won't have me?"

"Ah, Petra! you know better than that! Indeed I will. But I don't believe I can rely on you."

"Oh, yes, Gunnar! I shall be true—so true—to you."

He stood silent for a moment, and then:

"Let me look at your face, Petra," he said.

"Why?"

"I want to see if you're really in earnest."

"Do you think I'm joking, Gunnar?" she asked, provoked; and she raised her kerchief.

"Well Petra, if it's real, sober earnest, give me a kiss, so that I may know it's all right."

"Are you mad?" she cried, pulling the kerchief over her again, and walking fast away.

"Stop, Petra, stop! You don't understand. Now that we're sweethearts—"

"Oh, stuff and nonsense!"

"Well, I know what's the proper thing, don't I? I've seen far more of the world than you have. Just think of all that I've seen."

"Seen! Why, you've used your eyes like a numskull; and your talk's as silly as your sight."

"Well, then, what do *you* understand by our being sweethearts, eh, Petra? I suppose I may ask that much? To run up hills after one another doesn't seem to me much like it."

"No, that's true enough," she laughed, as she checked her pace. "But listen, now, Gunnar; and while we stand here and get breath I'll explain to you how lovers should behave to one another. So long as you are in the town, you shall wait outside the sewing-school every evening, and go home with me to our door; and if ever I go to any other house, you must wait in the street for me till I come. And when you're abroad, you must write to me, and buy things and send them me. Ah, I forgot! We shall want a couple of rings, with your name in one and mine in the other, with the year and the day of the month stamped on them, to give to one

another; but, as I've got no money, you must buy them both."

"That I'll do willingly enough; but—"

"Well, what do you want now with your 'buts'?"

"Good Lord! I was only thinking that I must get the measure of your finger."

"That you shall, and at once," she said, as she plucked up a piece of grass, measured her finger with it, and handed it him, saying:

"Don't throw it away, now."

He wrapped it up in a piece of paper and put the paper in his pocketbook. She kept her eye on him till the pocketbook was safely put away again.

"Let's go back, now," she said; "I'm tired of staying out longer."

"Well, I must say, it seems to me it's rather mean of you, Petra—"

"Oh, very well, my dear boy; if you don't like it, I dare say I can manage all right without you!"

"Oh, of course, it's not that! But mustn't I even take your hand?"

"What for?"

"To make certain that we really are engaged now?"

"How silly! As if it could make it more cer-

tain, if we catch hold of each other's hands! Oh, well! you're quite welcome to, if you want to—there's my hand—no, I don't want it squeezed, thank you!" and she drew it back again beneath her wrap, and at the same time raised the kerchief with both hands, so that her whole face was once more visible, as she went on:

"If you tell anybody about this, Gunnar, I'll just say that it's all untrue; do you understand?" and she laughed, and began to go down the hill again.

Presently she stopped once more:

"To-morrow evening the sewing-class will be over at nine o'clock, so you can be waiting behind the house then."

"All right."

"Yes, but now go!"

"Won't you give me your hand to say good-by?"

"I don't see what you keep wanting my hand for. No—you shan't have it now. Good-by!" and she bounded off from him.

Next evening she contrived to be the last to leave the sewing-school, and the clock was on the stroke of ten as she came out of the house; but when she got into the garden there was no Gunnar there. She had run over in her fancy all possible mis-

chances, save that alone; she was so certain that he would come that she waited just to be able to give it him well when he did. She was pleasantly enough entertained as she walked up and down the garden, for the Merchants' Glee Club in the house close by had just begun practising; the window was open, and a Spanish song so enchanted her as it fell upon the soft evening air that she seemed to be herself in Spain and hearing its songs of praise sung from the high altar.

Spain was the land of her heart's desire. Every summer brought the black Spanish hulls to the harbor, and then songs of Spain echoed through the streets of the little town. On Oedegaard's wall there hung a series of beautiful pictures of Spain, and very likely even now he was there, and she—she was with him! But she was brought back to herself again; for there, behind the apple tree, came Gunnar at last, hurrying along—no, not Gunnar, as she recognized, with a start, but the young merchant who had come back from Spain, Yngve of the yellow hair and yellow hat.

"Ha, ha, ha!" rang out his lightsome laugh, "did you take me for some one else?"

"No!" she said, with angry abruptness, and

dashed away in affright; but he sped after her, chattering away without ceasing as he ran, talking very quickly all the while with the glib fluency that men used to speaking various tongues acquire.

"See, I can keep up with you; I run very fast—running away's no good—I *must* talk to you: this is the eighth evening I've been waiting here."

"The eighth evening!"

"Yes, the eighth evening! and I'd gladly wait another eight to meet you, wouldn't I? It's no good your running; I won't let you get away from me, and you're tired now, I can see."

"No, I'm not!"

"Yes, you are!"

"No, I'm not!"

"Yes, you are! Talk, if you're *not* tired, then!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" she laughed.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he echoed. "Pooh, do you call that talking?" and they both came to a standstill.

Half in jest, half in earnest, they exchanged a few light words. He began to praise Spain, and one glowing description followed another, and he wound up with a curse for the little town at their

feet. Petra's eyes lighted up when he began to talk of Spain; it made her ears tingle to hear him; her gaze rested on the gold chain which he wore twice twisted round his neck.

"This chain," said he, suddenly, as he drew forth the end of it to which was fastened a gold cross, "this chain I brought to show the singing-club this evening; it comes from Spain. You shall hear its history," he continued.

"When I was in the South of Spain, I once went to a shooting-match and won the prize. At the banquet in the evening it was handed to me with these words: 'Take it with you to the North, and, with all respectful reverence from the gentlemen of Spain, give it to the fairest maiden in your native town.' Then the trumpets sang forth, the flags waved, the cavaliers applauded loudly, and I took the prize!"

"Oh, how beautiful!" burst forth from Petra's lips; for straightway there stood clear before her the Spanish festival with its bright Spanish colors and songs, and swarthy Spaniards, lighted up by the rays of the sun as it set over the vine-clad hills, turning their thoughts to the fairest maiden in the land of snow and ice.

Yngve was a young man of good disposition, despite his marvelous forwardness and self-conceit, and he went on telling her of these things. One story after another increased her longing for that wondrous land, and now, transported there in fancy, she began to hum the Spanish song that she had heard a short while before, and gradually to keep time to it with her feet.

"What!" he cried, "can you dance the Spanish dance?"

"Yes," she sang, her feet following the music, and with her fingers imitating castanets, as she had seen the Spanish sailors do.

"*You* deserve the Spaniards' gift!" he burst out, as if the thought had suddenly struck him; "you are the fairest maiden I have met with!" And he had taken the gold chain from his neck and twined it dexterously and many times round hers, before she well knew what he was about.

But *when* she realized what he had done, the deep flush, peculiar to herself, swept over her face, and the tears seemed about to gush forth from her eyes, so that Yngve, who had gone from one stage of wonder to another, was now stricken by a feeling of deep shame at what he had done, and knew

not what more he would have. His one feeling was that he had better go—so he went.

At midnight she was still standing by the open window of her attic, the chain in her hand. Gently lay the night of midsummer over town and fjord and distant hill; from the street came once again the sound of the Spanish song, for the glee club had gone home with Yngve Vold. Two voices only were singing the words, and the rest were imitating with their mouths the accompaniment of a guitar. Their song was of a beautiful garland, and she heard distinct and clear every word of it:

"Take this wreath and think of me,
Take this wreath—'tis fit for thee:
Greenest leaves and blossoms brightest
For the lass of lassies fairest;
Blushing roses, lilies whitest,
For the maiden purest, rarest.
Take this garland, fit for thee,
Take it—and forget not me."

When she opened her eyes next morning, it seemed to her she had been in a wood where the sun shone upon every part of it, and all the trees

were golden laburnums, from which hung long, shining clusters of blossom that nearly touched her as she made her way through. Straightway her thoughts flew to the chain: she seized it and flung it on over her nightdress; then she put a black handkerchief over the white linen, and put the chain on over that, for it looked better against the black. Still sitting on her bed, she looked at herself in the little hand-mirror, and wondered if she really were so pretty. She got up to do her hair. Suddenly she remembered that her mother as yet knew nothing about it: she must be quick and go down and tell her all. Just as she had finished dressing and was about to twine the chain round her neck, it occurred to her to wonder what her mother would say, what everybody would say, and what she should answer when they asked her why she wore that costly chain. The question was a very reasonable one, and seemed to her more and more difficult to answer every moment. At length she drew forth a little box, laid the chain in it, thrust the box into her pocket, and, for the first time in her life, felt what it was to be poor.

She did not go to her proper work that morning, but she sat up above the town, near the place where

the chain had been given her, holding it in her hand and feeling as if she had stolen it.

That evening she waited behind the garden for Yngve Vold even longer than she had waited for Gunnar the night before: she meant to give him back the chain. But, as it happened, Gunnar's ship had unexpectedly set sail the previous day, because there was a large amount of freight for it in the next port, and Yngve Vold, who owned it, had had to set off about the same business. He had plenty to do there besides, and so it was three weeks before he returned.

During these three weeks the chain had moved first from her pocket to the chest of drawers, thence into an envelope, and the envelope had been put into a secret place, while she had been moving from one humiliating discovery to another. Now for the first time she was fully aware of the distance which separated her from the ladies of the town; any of them might have worn the chain without anybody's asking why or wherefore. But Yngve Vold would not have dared to offer it to any of them, without offering his hand along with it; he only dared do such a thing to the Fisher Girl. If he had wanted to give her something,

why did he not give her something she could use? But he had only wanted to shame her the more deeply by giving her something which she could not by any possibility make use of. As for his tale about "the fairest maid," that was most likely all make-up; for if the chain had been awarded to her on those grounds, he would not have come in secrecy and by night. Anger and shame tortured her the more, because she no longer had any one in whom she could confide. It was no wonder, then, that the first time she met the cause of all her angry and humiliating thoughts again she reddened, so that he could not, she felt, help misconstruing her blush; and the thought of that made her blush the deeper.

She tore home again, pulled out the chain, and, darting out above the town, sat down to wait for him, though as yet it was broad daylight. Now he should have it back, at any rate! She felt quite certain he would come, for, in spite of his absence, he had blushed at the sight of her. But presently this very thought began to tell in his favor: he would not have changed color so if she had been nothing to him. He would have come before if he had been at home. Twilight was deepening, for

the days had fast been growing shorter during the last three weeks. But with the darkness, a change often comes over our resolution. She sat among the trees just above the road, and could see without being seen. She sat thus a little time, but he did not come, and it filled her heart with contending passions. She listened in anger at one moment, in terror the next; she heard the step of the passers-by long before she saw them; but it was never he. The birds, as they moved dreamily from one perch among the leaves overhead to another, were enough to frighten her, in her excited state of mind: every sound from the town below, every cry, startled her.

On board a great ship in the haven the sailors were heaving the anchor, singing as they worked, for it was to be towed out that night, to start off with the best of the early morning breeze. Oh, how she longed to be going with it on the mighty deep! The sailors' parting song seemed her own, the clang of the bars in the capstan seemed to give her strength to rise—what for? where to? See, there in the road, straight in front of her, was the yellow hat. She sprang up, and, without further thought, started off running, and, as she did so,

remembered that this was just the thing she ought not to have done: it was adding error to error; so she suddenly stopped. When he got up to where she was standing among the trees, her breathing was so long and deep that he could hear each separate breath, and her fear now had the same power over him as before her fearlessness had had. He looked at her in embarrassment—almost in bewilderment—as he said, in a low tone:

"Don't be frightened."

But she was trembling, as he could see. Thinking to give her confidence, he tried to take hold of her hand; but she, at the first touch, sprang up all on fire, and dashed away again, leaving him standing there.

She did not run far, for her breath was exhausted; her temples were throbbing and burning; her breast seemed as if it would burst; she pressed her hands against it, and listened. She heard a step in the grass, a rustle in the leaves: he was coming straight toward her. Did he see her? No, he did not! Yes, he saw her! No, he was going past!

It was not fear that reigned in her heart; but her excitement and agitation was such that when she

felt herself safe from him, her strength left her, and she sank down, senseless and powerless.

After a long time she rose and walked slowly down the hill, sometimes pausing, sometimes moving on again, as if she had no object in her emotions. When she got down to the road again, he was sitting there, patiently waiting for her. He got up, but she did not see him, for she was walking as if in a dream. She uttered no word, she made no gesture; she only laid her hands before her eyes and wept. This so completely overwhelmed Yngve Vold that his tongue—at other times so busy—came to a standstill. When at length he spoke, it was with a peculiar air of determination.

"This evening," he said, "I shall speak to my mother; to-morrow all shall be arranged, and in a few days you shall go abroad to be my wife."

He expected her to answer, or, at any rate, to look up; but she did neither. He interpreted this in his own fashion.

"You don't answer? You can not, I suppose. Very well, just rely on me; for from this moment you're mine! Good-night." And with these words he left her.

She walked home as if mist-clouds were thick about her; a slight feeling of dread glided in among them and tried to divide them, but the clouds rolled back upon her again.

All the power that Yngve Vold had had over her thoughts during the past three weeks had served to prepare a way for her mind to take possession of this new wonder and this new field for her fancy to inhabit. He was the richest man and of the best family in the town, and he wanted to lift her up to him above all cavil. This was a thing so unexpectedly different from the thoughts she had been nourishing of late in her anger and passion that it alone was enough to make her feel happy. And she grew happier and happier as she more fully took in her new and utterly overpowering position. She saw herself now inferior to none, and near the attainment of all her vague wishes. First and foremost she saw Yngve Vold's largest ship, all decked out with flags for their wedding-day, receiving them on board, and, after firing off minute-guns and sending up rockets, bearing them away to Spain, where shines the bridal sun.

When she woke next day, the maid came in and told her that it was half-past eleven! Petra felt

ravenously hungry and asked for food, which was brought her; she sent for more and ate it; her head was aching and her limbs were weary: she sank back to sleep again. When she woke, about three o'clock in the afternoon, she felt all right again. Her mother came up and said that no doubt she had slept her sickness off, she herself often did so; but now, she added, it was time for her to get up and go to her sewing-class. Petra sat up in bed and leaned her head on her arms; she answered, without looking up, that she should never go to the sewing-school again. Her mother thought that she was still a bit dazed from her long sleep, and went down to get a parcel and a letter which a ship's-boy had brought. What! was he sending her presents already?

Petra had lain down again, but she jumped up in a moment, and, with a sort of solemnity in her manner, opened the parcel as soon as she was alone —it contained a pair of French shoes. Somewhat disappointed, she was about to put it down, when she felt something heavy in the toes. She put in her hand, and drew out of one of the toes a little tissue-paper parcel; it contained a gold bracelet. In the other there was also a little parcel, carefully

wrapped up; it held a pair of French gloves, and from the right-hand glove she drew forth yet another wrapper, in which were folded two gold rings. "Already!" thought Petra, and her heart beat as she looked at the inscription; and there, sure enough, she saw in the one "Petra," followed by the year and the day of the month; and in the other "Gunnar." She turned pale; she flung the rings and the whole package on the floor as if it had burned her fingers, and tore open the letter. It was dated from Calais, and read as follows:

"Dear Petra—Just arrived here, after having had good winds from latitude 61 to latitude 54, and later on a toughish storm until we got here, which was hard work for better ships than ours to make way against, though ours is a good ship for going. You must know that all the way here I've been thinking of you, and of what happened between us last time; I'm so angry at not having been able to say 'good-by' to you properly, that I went on board in a very bad temper, but you've never been out of my mind for a moment, except now and again between whiles, for a sailor has a hard time of it, you know. But now that we've got here, I've spent all my wages in presents for you, as you asked me to, and the money I got

from mother I spent too, so that now I have none. But if I can get leave, I'll be with you almost as soon as the presents; for so long as it's secret between us, I can't feel certain about other people, especially young men, of whom there are so many about; but I want it known for certain, so that no one will have any excuse, and will know that he's got to beware of me. You can easily get a better fellow than me, for you can have any one you like; but you'll never find a more faithful one than I am. Now I will stop, because I have used up two sheets of paper, and the letters are getting so big, for this is the hardest thing I have had to do for you, but I'll go on doing it all the same, because you want me to. And now I end by saying that you were quite in earnest, I'm sure; for if you weren't it would be a great sin, and might bring unhappiness to many.

GUNNAR ASK,

"Second mate of the brig 'Norwegian Constitution.'"

A great fear fell upon Petra, and in a moment she was out of bed and dressed. She must get out, and advice must be found somewhere for her; for everything now had become confused, uncertain, and perilous. The more she thought over things, the greater the tangle seemed; she must get help from some one, else she would never unravel her-

self from it. But who was there whom she could trust? No one, surely, except her mother. When, after a long struggle with herself, she was standing by her in the kitchen, trembling and tearful, but strong in her resolve to trust her fully, and get in return her full help, the mother said, without looking up, and therefore without noticing Petra's face:

"Well, he's come home again! He's just been here."

"Who?" murmured Petra, and clutched for support. If Gunnar were back already, all hope was gone. She knew Gunnar; he was slow and good-tempered, but once roused to anger, he was mad in his wrath.

"You are to go up there at once, he said," continued the mother.

"Up there?" she repeated, trembling. She saw at once that he had told her mother all about their engagement; but what was to happen now?

"Yes, to the parsonage," added Gunlaug.

"To the parsonage? Mother, is it Oedegaard who's come home, then?"

"Who else should it be?" said the mother, turning to look at her.

"Oedegaard!" shouted Petra, rapturously; and

the storm of joy that swept over her purified all the air round her in a moment. "Oedegaard is come! Oh, God in heaven, Oedegaard is come!" and she was out of the door and over the fields, dancing, laughing, and crying out at the top of her voice. It was he—he—he whom she longed for; had he been at home, nothing would ever have happened! With him she was safe. The mere thought of his noble, shining face, his gentle voice, nay, even the quiet rooms, with their many pictures, in which he dwelt, made her feel more peaceful and secure again.

She took time to compose herself, and looked round at the town and country glowing in the sunset of autumn, and at the rich radiance that lay over the fjord; in the strait beyond, the curling smoke of the steamer that had brought Oedegaard was just dying away. Oh, merely to know that he was at home made her happy, well, and strong again! She prayed God to help her in keeping Oedegaard from ever leaving her again. And just as she was exalted by the mere hope of this, she saw him coming smiling toward her; he had known which way she would take, and had come to meet her! This touched her, and bounding up

to him, she seized both his hands and kissed them; this gave him a feeling of shame, and as he saw some one afar off, he drew her off the road and back among the trees, holding her hands in his while she kept on repeating:

"How glorious it is that you've come! Oh, I can hardly believe that it's you! Oh, you must never, never go away again! Don't leave, oh, don't leave me!"

Her tears began to flow, and he gently pressed her head against his shoulder to hide them; he wanted to calm her, for he needed her to be quiet. But she laid her head there, as a bird nestles beneath the wing that is raised for it, and she seemed as if she would like never to leave it.

Overcome by her trust in him, he put his arm round her, as if to assure her of the protection she sought; but no sooner was she aware of this than she lifted her tearful face to his, her eye met his, and all that can be expressed in a look, when repentance meets love, when gratitude meets the giver's joy, and when yes meets yes, came close upon one another. He drew her head to him and pressed his lips against hers. He had lost his mother early, and since then this was the first time

in his life that he had kissed one of the other sex; and she was equally inexperienced. He was trembling with excitement, but her face beamed with blushing joy, as she threw her arms round his neck and hung upon him like a child.

And when they sat down and she could touch with her hands his hair, his breast-pin, his neck-cloth, and all that she had before looked at from a respectful distance; and when he bade her say "thou" to him instead of "you" she could not; and when he tried to tell her how rich she had made his poor life from the moment of their first meeting, and how long he had struggled against his love so that it might not check her development, and so that he might not repay himself for his pains thus; and when he discovered that she was not in a state to take in or understand a word of what he was saying; and when he himself began to see little sense in it; and when she wanted to go home with him at once, and he had laughingly to ask her to wait a few days' time, so that they might travel away from the town together—then they felt, then they said, as they sat there among the trees, with fjord and mountain lying before them deep in the evening sun, that this indeed was

happiness. And afar off in the wood sounded the notes of a horn, and the words of a song, telling them it was so:

"Ah, sweet is Love's first meeting
As song amid the trees,
Or in the sunset fleeting,
Borne o'er the red'ning seas,
The sound of Nature's voices,
Whose mystic tones of love
Make for a span the soul of man
Even as souls above."

CHAPTER V

PETRA'S LOVERS MEET

NEXT morning Petra sat half-dressed in her room, and the whole day long she could get no further. Every time she made a new attempt, her arms sank back into her lap. Like the harebells in the fields, like the ear laden with grain, her thoughts bowed beneath their own weight. Peace, trustfulness, and all beauteous visions hovered above the airy castle wherein her soul dwelt. She went over all yesterday's meeting again and again —each word, each look, each pressure of the hand, each lover's kiss; she tried to go through it all, from their meeting to their parting, but it was in vain; for each separate thought led her into bright visions of the future, visions full of the promise of happiness. Sweet as these were, she must put them away from her, so as to try to call to mind where she broke off; but as soon as she had done so she plunged again into new wondrous dreams.

As she did not come down, her mother thought

that she must have begun her lessons again, now that Oedegaard was back; her meals were sent up to her, and she was to be left in peace the whole day. Not till evening was coming on did she rise and make herself ready; for now she was to go and meet her love. She put on her confirmation-dress —the best she had; it was not much to look at, but she had never perceived that before. She had had little taste in dress till now, but to-day it came upon her; one thing, she felt, did not match another properly, and when she had got them right, it still seemed to her not at all pretty. To-day she would have given anything to have really been "the fairest"; and as the words came into her mind, she put out her hands to thrust them off. Nothing, nothing should to-day be allowed to trouble her peace. She walked quietly about, gently putting one thing and another in its place about the room, for the time was not yet come. She opened the window and looked out; red, warm clouds lay encamped athwart the mountains; but the cool air flowed in with tidings from the woods hard by. "I am coming, I am coming!" it breathed, and she turned and went to the mirror to greet the bride there.

Just then she heard Oedegaard's voice talking to her mother below; she heard him being told where her room was: he was coming to fetch her! A strange wild feeling of joy thrilled through her, as she turned to see that everything was fit for him, and moved toward the door.

There came a gentle knock. "Come in," she answered softly, and stepped back a pace or two.

When Oedegaard had rung for his coffee that morning he was told that Yngve Vold, the merchant, had already called twice to see him. It jarred upon him to let a stranger enter upon his thoughts just on that day, but he felt that one who sought him so early must certainly have important business; moreover, he was scarcely dressed before Yngve Vold came again.

"Good-morning," he said. "You're surprised, of course, at my being here? Well, so am I myself."

Oedegaard returned his salutation, and Yngve laid down his hat.

"You lie abed late," he went on; "I have been here twice before. I have something on my mind that I *must* talk with you about."

"Won't you take a seat?" said the other, seating himself in an armchair.

"Thanks, thanks; I prefer to walk about: I am too excited to keep still. Since the day before yesterday I've been mad, clean mad, I believe, neither more nor less; and the fault is yours—yours!"

"Mine!"

"Yes, yours. Nobody had thought of the wench till you got hold of her; nobody took any notice of her till you brought her out. But now, any way, I've never seen anything like her, anything to come up to her, I tell you! In all Europe, I've never seen such a cursed marvelous little curly-haired creature—have you? I couldn't sleep because of her; I must have been bewitched; she was everywhere and always before my eyes. I took a voyage—I came back again—it was all no good, I tell you. I didn't even know who she was at first. The "Fisher Girl," they call her—gipsy, they ought to say, Spanish gipsy, witch—with her eyes, her breast, her hair all aglow. She jumps and dances about, flashing, laughing, sparkling, singing—a little devil, a veritable little devil. I ran after her one quiet night, you see, up among the trees in the wood yonder. She stopped, I stopped

—a few words, a song, a dance—and then? Why then I gave her the chain I had with me; as true as I stand here, I'd had no thought of doing so the moment before! Next time, at the same spot, the same chase for her; she was frightened, and I —will you believe it?—I couldn't speak a single word, daren't even touch her; and when she came again—can you believe me?—I offered to marry her, though I'd never thought of such a thing before! Yesterday I made up my mind to try myself and keep away from her, but, upon my heart and soul, I must be mad, stark mad; I *can not* do it; I must be with her; if I don't get her I'll shoot myself, honor bright I will, and that's the whole story. What do I care for my mother—devil take her!—or for this little town, this wretched little hole of a place. She shall get away from here, do you see, right away and far above this town; she shall be *comme il faut,* go abroad to France, to Paris; I'll pay for the journey, and you make all the arrangements. I might go with her, it's true, settle abroad, and not stop in this wretched little hole any longer; but then, you see, there's the fish! I want to make something out of this place; they're all asleep here; nobody thinks of anything, no-

body speculates! Ah! the fish, the fish! Nobody here looks after it properly. In Spain and other countries they're always making complaints about it. They need new methods of drying and packing, everything must be altered; the town must wake up, the trade go ahead, and the fish bring in millions, millions! Where did I leave off though? The fish, the Fisher Girl! Oh, well, they go well together: fish, Fisher Girl—ha, ha! Well then, as I say, I find the money, you make the arrangements; she becomes my wife, and then—"

He got no further. He had not, while he had been talking, taken any notice of Oedegaard, who now had risen to his feet, pale as a corpse, and fell upon him with a slender Spanish cane in his hand. The other's amazement was beyond description.

"Be careful," he cried, as he warded off the first few strokes; "you may hit me!"

"Yes, I *may* hit you! Spanish merchant, Spanish cane, they go well together—ha, ha!" And the blows rained down over his shoulders, arms, hands, face, and wherever he could hit him. The other dashed about the room wildly.

"Are you mad?" he yelled; "are you out of

your senses? I want to *marry* her, do you hear? To marry her, I say!"

"Go!" roared Oedegaard, whose strength was now exhausted. And away dashed his fair-haired visitor, through the door and down the stairs, just stopping for a moment in the street to call out for his hat. It was thrown down to him through the window, and then all was peace once more.

"Come in!" said Petra that evening, in answer to the soft knock, as she herself drew back a pace or two the better to look at her love as he entered. Like a stream of ice-cold water dashed over her, like the solid earth rent beneath her feet, was the sight of that face that appeared in the doorway! She staggered backward and grasped at the bed-post, but in thought she fell from the top of a precipice to the bottom. In less than a second, she who was but now the happiest of brides had fallen to be the worst of sinners. His face proclaimed it, as if with a voice of thunder—not through all time and eternity could he ever forgive her.

"I see it," he whispered in a scarcely audible tone, "I see it; you are guilty!"

He leaned against the door-post and caught hold

of the handle, as if he could not stand without it. His voice shook, and tears were rolling down his cheeks, but save for that he was calm.

"Do you know what you have done?" he said; and his eyes seemed to pierce her to the earth. She made no answer; she did not even weep; she was stricken by utter, hopeless powerlessness. "Once before I gave my soul away," he went on, "and he to whom I gave it was killed by my fault. I could not recover from that sorrow, unless some one should be allowed to reach out and give me back my soul, healed once more. That you have done —and done it by treachery."

He paused, and vainly made two attempts to go on again; and then, with a sudden rush of feeling, he cried:

"And could you go and cast aside, as if it were a thing of clay, all that I have been building, thought upon thought, day after day, in these long years! Child, child, could you not see that I was building my life up in yours? Well—all that's over now!" And he made another effort to control his agony.

"No," he began again; "you're too young to understand; you don't know what you've done.

But that you've *deceived* me, *that* you must know. Tell me, what have I done to you that you could be so cruel to me? Child, child, if you had only told me, even yesterday! Why, why have you deceived me so terribly?"

She heard what he said, and it was all true. He had staggered to a chair that stood by the window, and was leaning his head on the table beside it. He rose up, half sobbing with pain, then sat down again motionless.

"And I—and I who am not fit to help my old father," he moaned to himself; "I *can* not, I do not, feel the call for that work. Therefore no one may help me, and all my life must be a wreck."

He could say no more. His head sank upon his right hand, his left hung limp beside him; he looked as if he were not able to move; and thus he sat there, saying no word. Then he felt something warm against his hand, as it hung down; he gave a sudden start—it was Petra's breath. She was there on her knees beside him, her head bowed and her hands folded, looking at him in speechless prayer for mercy. He looked down at her in turn, and the eyes of neither moved. Then he raised his hands as if to keep her off; as if, as she looked

at him, he heard a persuasive voice in his heart to which he must not listen. Quickly, hastily, he bent down to pick up his hat, which had fallen on the ground, and hurried to the door. But quicker even than he, she cast herself down in the way, clasped his knees with her hands, and fixed her eyes on his, not saying a word the while; but as he stood there, he felt she was struggling for life. Then his old love overmastered him; once more he looked at her with eyes full of love and of agony, and clasped her head with both his hands. But there was a sighing and moaning in his heart as when an organ has just ceased to play: there is air still within, but no melody. He withdrew his hands, and in such a way that she could not help feeling what was in his mind. Alas! it was only too evident.

"No, no!" he cried; "you can enjoy emotion, but you can not love!" He was overcome for a moment, and then went on: "Unhappy child, I may no longer watch over your future. God forgive you for having made mine desolate!"

He went past her, but she did not stir: he opened the door and shut it after him, she did not speak. She heard him on the stairs, she heard his last foot-

step on the flagstones and down in the street; then she uttered one cry, one single cry, and her senses left her. However, at her cry her mother hastened up.

When Petra came to herself again she was lying in her bed, undressed and comfortably tucked in, and her mother sitting opposite her, with her head in both hands, and her fiery eyes fixed on her daughter.

"Have you finished your reading with him now?" she asked. "Have you now learned something, eh? And what is it that's to become of you *now?*"

The other's only answer was to burst out weeping. Long, long sat the mother there listening to her sobs, and then, with her own terrible earnestness, came the words: "Lord God, curse him body and soul!"

Up started Petra wildly. "Mother, mother!" she cried, "not him, not him, but me, me!"

"Oh, I know these men! I know what it is!"

"Oh, mother, he has been deceived, and by me; it is I who deceived him!"

She quickly told her mother everything, sobbing bitterly the whole time; she would not have *him*

suspected, even for a moment. She told her all about Gunnar, and what she had asked of him, not rightly knowing what she was doing; and then of Yngve Vold's luckless gold chain, and how it had entangled her; and then of Oedegaard, and of how everything else went out of her mind when she saw him. She did not know how it had all come about, but she felt she had done great wrong to all of them, especially to him who had taken her and given her all that one mortal can give another.

The mother sat in silence for a long time, and then she said:

"And have you done *me* no wrong? Where was *I* all this time, that you never told me a word about it?"

"Oh, mother, mother, help me! Don't be hard on me; I feel that I shall have to suffer for this as long as I live, so I will pray to God to let me die soon! Dear, good God," she began straightway, and she folded her hands toward Him—"Dear, good God, listen to my prayer. I have utterly ruined my life; there is nothing more for me now. I am not fit to live; I don't understand life; let me die, then, oh dear God!"

There was such a passionate intensity in her

prayer that Gunlaug, who had harsh words ready for her, swallowed them down, and laid her hand on her daughter's arm to stop her from praying thus.

"Control yourself, child; don't tempt the Lord. You must live, even though life's bitter."

She got up, and never set foot in Petra's attic again.

Oedegaard had fallen sick, and was in a perilous state. His old father moved upstairs to him, and made his workroom by his side; to all who begged him to spare himself he made answer that it was his work to watch over his son whenever that son lost any of those whom he loved more dearly than his father.

Such being the state of things, Gunnar suddenly came home!

He almost frightened his mother's life out of her by appearing so long before the return of the ship he went out with; she thought it was his double, and his acquaintances were not much wiser than she. To all their wondering questions he returned no reasonable answer; but the matter soon became clearer to them, for the very day he came back he was driven out of Gunlaug's inn, and that by Gun-

laug herself. From the steps she cried out to him, in a voice that echoed down Hollow Street:

"Don't you come here again; we've had quite enough of *your* sort!"

Before he had gone far, a girl came after him with a packet. The girl had another one besides; she gave him the wrong one, and Gunnar found in it a massive gold chain. He stood weighing it in his hands and staring at it. To begin with, he had not understood the reason of Gunlaug's mad wrath, but still less did he see why she should have sent him a gold chain. He shouted to the girl to come back. She must have made a mistake, she said, and she gave him the other packet, asking if that was his. It turned out to contain his presents to Petra. Yes, that was his, right enough; but whom was the gold chain for? That was for Vold, the girl answered, and went her way. Gunnar stood still, and gave himself up to thought. "Vold! does he give her presents? It must be he, then, who has stolen her from me—Yngve Vold! Oh, it's you, is it? Very well, then—" His excitement and anger needed some vent; he must have something to knock to pieces. "Very well, then, Yngve Vold!"

For the second time that day the luckless merchant was attacked unawares, and this time on his own doorstep. He tore away from the enemy into his office, with Gunnar after him. All the clerks fell upon the riotous intruder, who lashed out in all directions. Chairs, desks, and tables were overturned; letters, dockets, and invoices flew about like smoke. At length auxiliaries came from Yngve's wharf, and, after a mighty struggle, Gunnar was thrown out into the street.

But now the thing began to grow really serious. There happened to be two ships lying at the quay —one a foreigner, the other a Norseman; and as it was just dinner-time the sailors were all free to join in the fun. They joined battle at once, crew against crew, foreigners against natives; other crews were sent for, and came dashing up at full speed; the laborers, the old women, and the boys lent their aid, and at last there was nobody who knew either why or with whom he was fighting. It was no good for the skippers to come and swear at the men; it was no good for the respectable citizens to give their orders for the town's only policeman to be fetched—he happened to be out on the fjord, fishing. They ran to the mayor, who was

also postmaster, but he was shut up with the post-bag that had just arrived, and answered through the window that he could not come; his post-clerk was at a funeral, so they must wait. But as they would not stop murdering one another till the letters were sorted, many people—especially old women—shouted out that Arne, the smith, ought to be fetched. This met with the respectable citizens' approval, and Arne's wife went to get him; "for the policeman was not at home," she said.

He came, much to the joy of the schoolboys. Striking a few blows among the crowd, he got hold of one rash Spaniard, and used him as a club to belabor the others with at random.

When all was over, the mayor came along with his walking-stick. He found some old women and children talking together on the field of battle. He bade them, with severity, go home to their dinners, and straightway did the same himself.

But the day after he held an inquiry, which occupied some time, as no one seemed to have the least idea as to who had been engaged in the fight; only all were agreed that Arne, the smith, had been in the thick of it, for they had seen him striking others with a Spaniard. For this Arne had to pay a fine

of a daler, and his wife, who had led him into it, got a beating from him on the eleventh Sunday after Trinity, as she had good cause to remember. These were the only judicial results of the fray. But other results there were. The little town was no longer a quiet little town: the Fisher Girl had turned it topsy-turvy. The strangest stories were about, arising from a feeling of jealous anger against her for having been able to attract to her the cleverest man in the town and the two richest bachelors, to say nothing of "several" besides; for Gunnar gradually grew to be "several young men."

Soon there was a universal storm of moral indignation. The disgrace of being the cause of a great street riot, and of having brought sorrow into three of the best families of the town, hung over the head of a young girl who had only been confirmed some six months before: three sweethearts at a time, and one of them her teacher, her benefactor! Nay, indignation at this could not be held in. Had she not been the plague of the town even in her childhood? had they not, despite that, shown her by their gifts what they hoped of her, when Oedegaard took her up? And had she not now put them all to shame, crushed Oede-

gaard's life, and, following the bent of her nature, thrown herself, without restraint, into courses that must make her an outcast from society, and bring her, in old age, to the House of Correction? Her mother must have been her accomplice, and the child must have learned her wicked ways in the Seaman's Inn. The yoke that Gunlaug had laid upon the town must no longer be tolerated; neither she nor her daughter could be suffered to remain any longer among them. Let every one unite to drive them away!

That evening a crowd, made up of seamen who owed Gunlaug money; of tippling workmen, for whom she would not get work; and of youths, to whom she refused to give credit, mingled with some people of the better sort, assembled on the hill. They whistled, they hooted; they yelled out for the "Fisher Girl" and for "Fish-Gunlaug." Presently a stone was hurled at the door, and then another through the attic window. Not till midnight did the noise die away. Behind the windows all had remained dark and noiseless.

Next day not a single person came to the inn, not so much as a child went by the house on the hill. But in the evening there was the same riotous

mob as before, save that now all joined in, without distinction. The flowers were trampled down, the windows all broken in, the garden hedge torn up, and the young fruit trees rooted out. Then the crowd began to sing:

‘ ‘Mother, I’ve hooked a sailor fine.’
‘Well done, my lass!’
‘Mother, I’ve made a merchant mine.’
‘Well done, my lass!’
‘Mother, a parson’s on my line.’
‘Then pull in, my lass!
Men come and go,
And we older grow;
And what’s the good if the big fish bite
When you can’t pull ’em into your boat so tight?’

“ ‘Mother, he’s gone, that sailor fine.’
‘Has he, my lass?’
‘Mother, he’s gone, that merchant mine.’
‘Has he, my lass?’
‘And the parson’ll soon be off my line.’
‘Then pull in, my lass!
For men come and go,
And we older grow;

And what's the good if the big fish bite
When you can't pull 'em into your boat so tight?' "

Then the crowd began to yell loudly for Gunlaug, for they wanted to hear her burst forth in her matchless wrath.

But Gunlaug, though she heard every word, sat silent within the house, because, for one's child's sake, a woman must be able to bear much.

CHAPTER VI

FLIGHT

PETRA was in her room on the first evening when the whistling, shouting, and hooting began. She sprang up, as if the house were on fire around her, or were falling to pieces above her head; she dashed about her room as if beaten by burning rods. There was a singing and burning in her breast; her thoughts were straining for an outlet, but down to her mother she dared not go, and before her only window stood the mob! A stone came flying through it, and fell on her bed; she gave a scream, and flew into one corner and hid behind a curtain among her old clothes. There she sat, crouched up, burning with shame, trembling with fear. Visions of unknown terrors floated in upon her. The air was filled with faces, gaping, grinning faces, that came close up to her own, while all around rained fire. Oho! it was not fire, but eyes! It was raining, pouring down eyes

—great glowing eyes, small twinkling eyes, eyes that stood still, eyes that ran to and fro. "O Lord Jesus, help, help!" cried Petra in her agonized fright.

Ah! what a relief it was when the last shout died away in the night, and all was black and still once more. She stole forth and threw herself on her bed, hiding her face in the pillows; but she could not hide herself from her thoughts. First and foremost in them stood the figure of her mother, mighty and threatening as the thunder-clouds that gather round the mountains. Ah! what must not her mother be suffering for her sake! To her eyes fell not a wink of sleep, on her soul no peace; and day came, and brought no balm. She got up and walked to and fro, round and round, her only thought how she could make her escape; but she dared not meet her mother, and she dared not go out so long as it was daylight, and with the evening *they* would come again! But wait she must; for before midnight it was still more perilous to attempt to fly. And where was she to fly to? She had no money; she knew of no place to go to; but surely, she thought, there must be merciful, kindly folk somewhere, just as there was a merciful, kind

God. *He* knew that however much she might have erred, it was not deliberately; He knew her remorse, and He too knew her helplessness. She listened for her mother's movements down below, but she heard none; she trembled at the thought of hearing her footstep on the stairs, but she did not come. The girl who came to work there had doubtless fled, for no one brought Petra anything to eat. The broken window-pane let the cold air in in the morning, and now that evening was coming on it was still worse. She had made up a small bundle of her clothes and dressed herself completely, so as to be ready. But she must wait for the raging mob again, and bear whatever they might do.

There they were again! Whistling, hooting, throwing stones—worse, far worse, than last night! She crept into her corner, folded her hands, and never ceased to pray. If only her mother would not go out to them! If only they would not break in! Then they began to sing a coarse libelous ditty, and though every word cut her like a knife, yet she must sit and listen to it; but when she heard her mother's name mixed up with it, and knew that they had had the shameful injustice to make out

Gunlaug as guilty as herself, she sprang up and dashed forward, determined to speak to the cowardly crew or throw herself down among them—but a stone, and then another, and then a whole storm of stones flew through the windows, splinters of the broken glass whizzed about, and stones kept whirling round the room. She crept back again to her refuge. She was perspiring, as if the hottest rays of the sun were upon her, but she no longer wept, and her fear had left her.

Little by little the noise began to ebb; she ventured forth, and, as soon as nothing was to be heard, tried to get to the window; but she kept treading on crackling splinters of glass: she stepped back again, walking softly on the stones so as not to be heard; for now was the time for her to creep away. After waiting for more than half an hour, she took off her shoes, picked up her bundle, and softly opened the door. She waited another five minutes, and then walked gingerly downstairs. It pained her deeply to have to leave her mother without farewell, after all the trouble she had brought upon her; but fear urged her on. "Good-by, dear mother! Good-by, dear mother!" she whispered to herself as she went down each step. "Good-by,

mother dear!" And now she stood on the last step, and drew several long breaths, and then was at the door.

Just then her arm was grasped from behind; she gave a faint scream, turned, and was face to face with her mother! Gunlaug, who had heard the door open, knew at once what Petra meant to do, and stood waiting for her. Petra felt that she would not get by without a struggle. Explanation would be of no avail; whatever she might say, she would not be believed. Well, let there be a struggle, then! nothing in the world could be worse than the worst, and this she had lived through.

"Where are you going?" asked the mother in a low tone.

In equally low tones, but with a beating heart, answered Petra:

"I must go."

"Where will you go to?"

"That I don't know—but I must get away from *here!*"

She grasped her bundle tight and began to move again. But her mother held her arm, and said:

"Come, follow me—I have foreseen this."

Straightway Petra gave herself up, as one might

give up a burden far too heavy for one's strength; she drew long breaths, as if after a tough struggle, and yielded to her mother. The latter went into a little closet at the back of the kitchen, where there was no window, but in which a candle was burning; it was here she had sat in hiding, during the tumult without. The closet was so small, there was scarce room to move in it; the mother drew forth a bundle somewhat smaller than Petra's, opened it, and took out a seaman's dress.

"Put these on," she whispered.

Petra saw at once why she was to do so, but it touched her that her mother said never a word about it. She undressed, and put the other things on, her mother helping her, and as she did so, and the light fell upon her, Petra looked at her face, and saw for the first time that Gunlaug was old. Had she become so during these last two days, or had Petra never noticed it before? The child's tears rolled down upon the mother, but Gunlaug never looked up at her, so that Petra spoke no word. A sou'wester was the last thing she had to put on; and when that was done the mother took her bundle from her, blew out the light, and whispered:

"Now come."

They went out into the passage, but not through the street door: Gunlaug opened the gate into the yard, and locked it again. They walked through the trampled garden, over uprooted trees, and past the broken hedge.

"You'd best look round you well now," said the mother; "you'll never come here again."

The other shuddered, but did not look round. They took the upper road, along the wood in which she had spent half her life—where she had been that evening with Gunnar, that evening with Yngve Vold, and that last one with Oedegaard. They were walking through the withered leaves that had now begun to fall. The night was icy cold, and Petra shivered in her unwonted clothes. The mother turned aside toward a garden, and Petra recognized it at once, though she had never been on that side of it since the day when, as a child, she had led the attack on it—for it was Pedro Ohlsen's orchard. The mother had a key, and opened the gate.

It had cost Gunlaug much to go to him that morning, and it cost her much more to come to him now with the luckless daughter whom she

could no longer shelter. She rapped at the garden door, and almost at once steps were heard and a light was seen. A moment after the door was opened by Pedro, who stood inside, pale and scared, dressed in traveling clothes, and wearing traveling boots. He held a tallow candle in his hand, and he sighed as his eyes fell on Petra's face, all swollen with weeping. She looked up at him; but as he did not dare to recognize her, she did not venture to recognize him.

"This man has promised to help you to get away," said the mother, without looking at either of them, as she went a few steps up the passage, and the others followed her into Pedro's room on the opposite side. The room was small and low; the close, confined air smote upon them as they came in, and made Petra feel sick, as for more than a day and night she had neither slept nor eaten. In the middle of the room there hung a cage with a canary in it, and they had to go round it to avoid striking it. The heavy old chairs and the solid table, the two great countrified presses which almost touched the ceiling, dwarfed everything else, and seemed to make the room even more confined than it was. On the table lay music and a flute.

Pedro Ohlsen slouched about in his great boots as if he were busily doing something. A faint voice from the room behind was heard, saying: "Who is that? Who is in there?" which caused him to shuffle about still quicker, as he mumbled out: "Oh, it's—er, er, it's—er, er—," and finally went off to where the voice came from.

Gunlaug sat by the window with both elbows on her knees and her head on her hands. She looked fixedly down at the sand, with which the floor was strewn, but she said not a word, only at intervals she heaved deep sighs.

Petra stood by the door, her legs knocking together, and her hands pressed against her breast, for she was beginning to feel sick. An old-fashioned clock was ticking out the seconds; the tallow candle stood on the table with a long, guttering wick. Presently the mother tried to give a reason for their presence there.

"I used to know that man once," she said.

Not many words, and no answer. Pedro kept away. The light guttered melancholically, and the clock kept up its ticking. Petra was feeling more and more sick, and through it all her mother's "I used to know that man once," kept whistling in

her ears. The clock took it up, and began to tick out, "I— used— to— know— that— man— once." Whenever, in her subsequent life, Petra encountered close, faint air, that room straightway stood before her with the memories of her sickness and the clock's "I—used—to—know—that—man—once." Whenever she went on a steamer, the smell of the oil, the bilge-water under the cabin, or the vapor of cooking meat, always made her feel seasick at once, and constantly through her sickness that room stood day and night before her eyes, and in her ears was the sound of the clock ticking out its "I—used—to—know—that—man—once."

When Pedro came in again he had put on a woolen cap and a clumsy, old-fashioned coat, which went up to his ears.

"I am ready," he said, and began to pull on his thick mittens, as if he were going out in the depths of winter. "But we mustn't forget"—he turned round—"the cloak for—for—"

And he looked at Petra, and from her to Gunlaug, who now took up a blue cloak which was hanging over the back of a chair, and helped Petra to put it on; but when she had the full odor of

the place thus immediately beneath her nose, it was so overpowering that she begged for fresh air. Gunlaug saw she was not well, opened the door, and quickly led her out into the garden. Petra drank in long, full drafts of the fresh autumnal air in the cool night.

"Where am I going?" she asked, when she had begun to feel a little better.

"To Bergen," answered the mother, helping her to fasten her cloak; "it is a big town, where nobody knows you."

When she had finished she took her stand by the garden gate, and said:

"You will have a hundred daler to take with you; so that if you don't get on you'll then have something to fall back upon. This man here is going to lend it you."

"Give—give it!" whispered Pedro, as he passed them and went out into the road.

"Lend it you," repeated the mother, as if he had not spoken. "I shall pay him back again."

She took a handkerchief from her neck, tied it round Petra's, and said:

"You are to write to me as soon as you're getting on all right, but not before."

"Mother!"

"And this man will row you on board the ship that lies out there in the fjord."

"Oh, mother! Good God! Dear mother—"

"And now there's nothing more to say. I shall go with you no further."

"Mother! Mother!"

"God be with you. Farewell!"

"Mother, dear mother, forgive me!"

"And don't catch cold on the water."

She had gently pushed Petra outside the garden gate, and now she shut it from within.

Petra stood without the closed gate, and felt about as desolate and lonely as it is possible for mortal to feel; but just then, from out of the midst of her tears, her woes, and her feeling of exile, there sprung up within her, as if by inspiration, a sudden confidence. Like a tongue of fire that has been kindled and then quenched, it blazed high into the air and sunk down again, extinguished indeed, but, for one moment, gloriously bright. She opened her eyes, and stood once more in thick darkness.

In silence, through the deserted streets of the little town, by the close-shut, leafless gardens, past

the houses, locked and lightless, she slowly followed the slouching form in the great boots and the long cloak that left him no head. They came out upon the avenues, and trod once more through the withered leaves, where the sere green branches stretched out long spectral arms to seize them. They climbed their way down across the hill to the yellow boathouse, where their skiff lay, and the man at once began busily to bale it. He rowed her out from the land, which now lay a black mass beneath the heavy skies. Fields, houses, forests, mountains, were all blotted out: nothing more could she now see of the things which till yesterday she had seen every day of her life. Like the town, like mankind, they had locked themselves into the darkness of night; and she was cast out, and no voice bade her farewell.

A man was pacing up and down on the deck of the ship, as it lay at anchor waiting for the morning wind; as soon as he saw them under the ship's side, he lowered a rope-ladder, helped them on board, and told the captain of their arrival, who immediately came up on deck. She knew him, and he her; but without a question, or a word of sympathy, he told her, as if her being there was

a matter of course, all that she needed to know—namely, where her berth was, and what she was to do if she wanted anything or felt sick. The latter she did almost as soon as she went down, and so directly she had changed her clothes she came up on deck again, where a fragrant odor met her. It was the smell of chocolate, and straightway a mighty feeling of hunger fell upon her, and seemed to tear and rend her breast; and just then up came the same man who had received them on board with a bowl full of it and a lot of cakes from the cook-room; her mother had sent them, he said; and while she was eating, he went on to tell her that she had also sent on board a chest with her best clothes, her linen and woolen garments, as well as food and other useful things.

A vivid image of her mother came into her mind at that moment—a magnificent figure, such as she had never pictured her before, but never ceased to do all the rest of her life. And with it she made a vow, with confident yet humble prayer, that some time she would be able to give her mother some great joy in return for the sorrow that she caused her now.

Pedro Ohlsen sat beside her when she sat, and

walked by her when she walked, trying hard not to be in her way, and consequently being always in the way on the deck, crowded as it was with goods. Of his face she could see nothing but the great nose and the eyes, nor could she see these distinctly; yet he gave her the impression of being burdened with something he wanted to say, but could not. He sighed, sat down, got up, walked about round her, sat down again; but no word came from his lips, and she did not speak.

At length he felt he must give it up. He drew drearily out of his pocket a huge leather pocket-book, and whispered that the hundred daler were in it, and a little more besides. She gave him her hand as she thanked him, and as she did so, his face was so near her that she could see his eyes dwelling upon her with a tearful glance, for with her the last remnant of life that had preserved his decaying existence was leaving him. What he wanted was to say something to her which should make her think lovingly of him when he, before long, should be no more; but he had been forbidden to do so; and though, in spite of that, he would have done it, yet he could not manage it, for she gave him no help!

The truth was, Petra was exceedingly tired, and the recollection that he had been the cause of her first sin against her mother would not leave her. She could not bear to have him with her, and the longer he sat there the worse it grew, for when one is tired, one is apt to be peevish. The poor wretch felt this. It was time for him to be going, he said, and drew his withered hand out from beneath his mittens, and bade her a whispered good-by. She laid her warm hand in his, and both got up.

"Thanks," she said, "and accept my farewell greeting."

He gave a sigh, or rather a groan, then another one or two, let go her hand, turned, and walked backward, and in silence, down the ship's ladder. She went to the bulwarks; he looked up, waved a farewell to her, took his seat in the boat, and rowed slowly off. She stood there till he was a black spot in the blackness around. Then she went below, for she could scarcely stand, so tired was she; and though she felt sick the moment she came down, she had scarcely laid her head on the pillow, and said the first two or three lines of the Lord's Prayer, before she was asleep.

Meanwhile her mother sat by the yellow boat-

house: she had slowly followed them the whole way, and sat there by the boathouse while they were putting off from the land. From the same spot, in days gone by, Pedro Ohlsen had put off with her from the land. That was long, long ago; but it must perforce come into her mind now, when he was rowing her daughter away.

As soon as she saw him coming back alone, she got up and went; for she knew by that that her daughter was safe on board. She did not take the road homeward, but, finding in the darkness the path that led over the mountains, made her way along it. Her house in the town stood ruined and desolate for more than a month; she did not mean to go back till she had received good news from her daughter.

Meanwhile, the feeling against her was put to the proof. Meaner natures ever feel a secret joy in banding together to persecute a stronger one, but that only so long as the latter is able to make resistance; when they see that the other quietly puts up with ill-treatment, a feeling of shame comes upon them, and they hiss at any one who now would cast a stone. The mob had rejoiced in the thought of hearing Gunlaug's mighty voice

echoing down Hollow Street; they had in imagination seen her calling on the seamen for help, and stirring up a street row.

As she refused to show herself, the people were wellnigh uncontrollable on the third night. They would break in after her; they would pitch the two women into the street; they would drive them, hunt them, out of the town. The windows had not been mended since the night before, and it was amid tremendous cheering that two men climbed through them to open the door. And then—in stormed the whole crew!

They looked into every room, upstairs and downstairs; they burst the doors open; they broke into atoms all that stood in their way; they searched every corner, not excluding the cellar, but neither mother, nor daughter, nor any living thing could they find.

A sudden silence fell upon them all the moment the real state of things was made plain; those inside the house came out, one by one, and drew back behind the others. Presently the house was empty.

Before long, there were some in the town who said that it was a shameful thing to have acted thus toward two defenseless women.

They went on discussing the matter, until at last all were agreed that whatever wrong the Fisher Girl might have done, it was certainly not Gunlaug's fault, and therefore she had been very unjustly treated. She was sorely missed in the town. Quarrels and disturbances arising from drink began to be the order of the day, for the town had lost its police. Folks missed her commanding figure in her doorway as they went by; and more than any one else did the sailors miss her. No place was as hers had been, they said, for with her every man was treated according to his merits, and had his place in her confidence and her help whatever happened. Neither seamen nor skippers, neither employers nor housewives, had understood her real value till now that she had disappeared.

Therefore, a unanimous feeling of gladness ran through the town when it was said that some one had seen her in her dwelling, cooking and roasting as usual. Every one felt he must go and make certain for himself that the window-panes were replaced, the door mended, and the smoke curling out of the chimney.

Yes, it was all true; there she was again! They

crept up on the other side of Hollow Street to get a better view of her; she was sitting in front of the oven, and looking neither up nor down as her eye followed her hand, and her hand was busily working, for she had come back to earn again what she had lost, and first and foremost the hundred daler that she owed to Pedro Ohlsen.

At first people were content with looking in on her—their evil conscience kept them from entering the house; but by degrees they began to come in. First came the housewives, the kind-hearted, friendly creatures; but they got no chance to talk anything but business with her, for Gunlaug gave no heed to anything else. Then came the fishermen, then shippers and skippers to hire green sailors; and, last of all, on the first Sunday after her return, came the regular seamen. There must have been an agreement among them all to come that evening, for all of a sudden the house was so packed that not only were both the rooms fully occupied, but even the tables and chairs, which stood in the garden in summer-time, had to be brought in and put in the passage, in the kitchen, and in the back parlor.

No one looking at this assembly would have

guessed with what feelings those people sat there; for Gunlaug had resumed her silent sway over them again the moment they crossed her threshold, and the calm dignity with which she waited on each one turned aside all questions and all words of welcome. She was the same as ever, save that her hair was no longer black, and her bearing was somewhat quieter. But when the seamen began to grow merry they could no longer restrain themselves; and now, each time the servant left the room, they called upon Knud, the boatswain, who had always been a favorite of hers, to drink her health when she came in again. He could not pluck up courage for it until he was somewhat warmed in the head; and then at last, when she came in and was putting together the empty bottles and glasses, he rose and said: "It is a very good thing she is back again. For it is quite certain that—it is a very good thing she is back again."

This seemed to them a very neat speech, so they stood up and shouted: "Hear! Hear! A very good thing!" And those in the passage, and those in the kitchen, and those in the other room, got up and joined in accord; and the boatswain gave her a

glass and shouted "Hurrah!" and then they hurrahed all together, as if they were trying to raise the roof to the skies. Presently somebody said that they had done her shameful injustice, another took his oath they had, and soon they were all declaring and swearing that they had done her most shameful injustice.

When at last there was quiet again, as they wanted a word from Gunlaug, she said that she thanked them very much. "But," she added, as she went on gathering the empty glasses and bottles into a pile, "so long as I say nothing about it, you don't need to either." She went out with as large a pile of glasses as she could carry, and came back again for the others. And ever after that evening her power was absolute.

CHAPTER VII

THE GREATEST CALLING ON EARTH

In the evening and in darkness the ship cast anchor in Bergen Harbor. Half dazed with sea-sickness, Petra was taken in the captain's boat through a number of ships, great and small; then through the crowd of ferrymen on the quays; then through the shoal of peasants and street-boys in the narrow streets through which their way ran. They stopped before a pretty little house, where an old woman, at the captain's introduction, gave Petra a kindly welcome. She needed food and sleep, and both her cravings were soon satisfied. Fresh and bright did she feel when she awoke at noon, next day, to new sounds and new voices around her, and —when the curtain was drawn aside—to new scenery, new people, and a new town. She was herself a new person, it seemed to her, as she stopped before the glass; her face was not as of old. She could not see what exactly it was that made this

difference, for she did not know that at her age sorrow and anguish make the face more delicate and spiritual; but as she saw herself in the glass, she could not keep her thoughts from the past few nights, and as she thought of them, she trembled. So she made haste to get ready to come downstairs to the new world awaiting her there.

She found her hostess and several other ladies, who first looked her up and down from top to toe, and then promised to look after her; as a beginning they proposed showing her round the town. There were several things that she wanted to buy, so she ran upstairs for her pocketbook, but not caring to bring the great clumsy book down with her, she opened it in her room and took out the money. She found not a hundred daler, but three hundred! So Pedro Ohlsen had given her money again without her mother's knowledge or consent! So little did she know the value of it that the greatness of the sum did not surprise her; therefore it never occurred to her to guess at the possible reasons for such great liberality. Instead of a letter brimming with gratitude, with perhaps a question or two of surmise, Pedro Ohlsen got a letter from Gunlaug that her daughter had written her, in

which, with scarce concealed anger against him, she betrayed her benefactor and asked what she was to do with the money he had smuggled in.

The first thing that struck upon Petra's senses in the town was its scenery. She could not get rid of the feeling that the mountain was hanging close above her head, and that she must be careful how she went. Each time she raised her eyes, she felt a sense of oppression, coupled with an inclination to stretch out her hands and knock on it to get free. At times, too, it seemed that there was no outlet for her. Sun-forsaken and murky stood the mountain; the clouds hung close about it and whirled around its head; wind and rain strove below in constant alternation: they came from the mountain, the mountain set them free and poured them out over the town. But over the throng of people around her was no such feeling of oppression; she grew cheerful among them at once, for in their activity there lay a light-hearted, merry freedom, such as she had never known, and which seemed to her, after what she had lately gone through, like a welcoming smile. Next day at dinner she said that she would like to go where there were plenty of people, and was told that she had better go to

the theatre then, for there she would see many hundreds under one roof. Yes, she would like it, she said; and a ticket was got for her to the theatre close at hand. She was taken there, and her place pointed out to her in the first row of the balcony. She sat among many hundred happy faces in a great blaze of light, with gay colors sparkling around her, and a hum of talk from all quarters, breaking around her like the noise of the billows.

Petra had not the least idea of what she was going to see. All that she knew was what she had learned from Oedegaard, or picked up in chance talk. Now Oedegaard had never spoken a word to her about such things; the seamen had only told her of theatres where there were wild beasts and riders of bare-backed horses, and the lads she had talked with had never said anything about plays, even if they had learned something of them at school. Her little town had no theatre, nor even a building fit for the purpose; traveling circuses, rope-dancers, and merry-andrews, either made use of a warehouse or the open fields. She was so ignorant of it all that she did not even think of asking; she sat there in cheerful expectation of

some wonderful thing, as, for instance, camels, or perhaps monkeys.

Occupied with thoughts of this, she gradually began to see animals in every face around her, and it amused her to find in them horses, dogs, foxes, cats, mice, and so forth, so that the orchestra had got into their places without her noticing it. She gave a sudden start when the overture began with a short, sharp crash of drums, cymbals, bassoons and horns; never in her life had she heard music from more than a couple of fiddles at a time, with perhaps a flute. The crashing glory of the music made her turn pale, for it seemed to her like the roaring of the cold, black sea; she sat fearing that what came next might be more terrible, but yet she did not want it to stop.

Presently gentler harmonies broke upon her, and visions flocked in upon her such as she had never seen in her dreams of old. Sweet melodies were in the air above, gladness and life floating around her; all seemed to be moving upward on mighty wings, anon gently sinking again; now drawing majestically together, now gaily and merrily breaking apart—when lo! a great darkness fell upon all and overwhelmed it, and all was swept

away in a roaring cataract. But then uprose one single strain, as of a bird on a bough wet with spray, from the depths beneath; sadly and timidly it began, but with its song the air above grew clearer, and the sun began to peep forth; and now again long blue vistas opened before her, filled with wondrous flickering shapes in the sun's golden rays. Lo now! after a while the song was quietly dying away: the joyous hosts drew farther and farther off, and nothing was there save the glow of the sun, softening and permeating the air; only the sun, with endless space beneath lighted up and silent in its rays. And she sat dreaming in radiant happiness.

Involuntarily she rose when the music stopped; for her bright visions stopped too! But see! Oh, wonder! the beautiful painted wall in front of her was going up to the roof! She was in a church with arches and pillars, with the sound of the organ thrilling it, a church beautifully adorned, and people were coming toward her in dresses which she did not recognize, yes, and talking—yes, talking in the church, and in a tongue that she did not understand. What was that? there were voices behind her too. "Sit down!" they were saying, but as

there was nothing to sit on, the two in the church naturally remained standing; and the longer she looked at them, the clearer it grew to her that their garments were like those she had seen in a picture of Saint Olaf—and he, he was surely saying Saint Olaf's name! "Sit down!" she heard from behind again. "Sit down!" many voices were shouting. "There must be something behind there as well," thought Petra, and turned quickly round. A sea of angry faces, some of them looking threatening, met her gaze. "There must be something wrong somewhere," said Petra to herself, and was about to go, when an old lady who sat beside her gently pulled at her dress and whispered: "But why don't you sit down, my dear? The people behind can't see, you know!" In a moment she was in her seat again. "Why, of course, it's the theatre down there, and we're looking at—of course, the theatre!" And she went on repeating the word "theatre" as if to keep herself aware of it.

She looked down into the church again, but she could not, in spite of all her pains, understand a word the man who was speaking said; but gradually, when she had grasped the fact that he was a young and handsome man, she took in a word

here and there; and when she found that he was in love and talking of love, she began to understand it all. Then a third person entered, who for the moment distracted her attention from him, for she saw from his dress that he must be a monk, and a monk she had often longed to see. Very quietly and gently did the monk walk about; he had a truly pious look, and he spoke so plainly and deliberately that she could follow every word. But all of a sudden he turns aside, and says the very opposite of what he has just been saying. Good God! he is a villain! Listen to him, he must be a villain; and see how he looks it now! Can not that handsome young man see that? In any case, can not he hear it?

"He is deceiving you!" she cried, beneath her breath.

"Hush!" said the old lady.

No, the young man did not hear it; he went away in dangerous confidence; and then the others went. Now an old man comes in. Why, what is this? When the old man speaks it sounds as if the young one was speaking, and yet he is an old man. But look, look at that! A gleaming host of white-clad maidens, silently, and two by two, are slowly walk-

ing through the church. They were present to her thoughts long after she ceased to see them, and there swept before her eyes a sight that came from her childhood's days. She had been taken by her mother one winter over the mountain. As they walked along in the new-fallen snow they inadvertently startled a brood of ptarmigan, which suddenly filled the air about them; the birds were white, the snow was white, the woods were white; for a long while all her thoughts were of white things, and now for a moment here in the theatre it was the same.

But now one of these white-clad maidens steps forth alone with a wreath in her hands, and kneels down; the old man is also on his knees, and she is talking with him. He has evidently tidings and letters for her from a foreign land. He draws the letter out, and it is easy to see that it must be from him she loves. Ah, how delightful! they certainly all love one another here. She opens it. Why, it's no letter, for it is full of music. But look, look! he himself is the letter. The old man is the young one, and is he whom she loves. They embrace one another. Dear God, they are kissing! Petra felt she was getting fiery-red, and hid her face in her

hands, but went on listening. Hark! he is telling her that they must go and be married at once, and she laughingly pulls his beard, and says he's become a barbarian; and he says she's grown so beautiful, and gives her a ring, and promises her scarlet and velvet, golden shoes, and a golden sash; and merrily he bids her farewell as he goes off to the king to tell him of the bridal. His betrothed looks after him with a look that lights up everything; and when he is gone, and she turns, everything seems blank and dull.

Then suddenly the painted wall comes down again. Can it be over already—just as it was beginning? She turned, with a blush, to the old lady:

"Is it over?"

"No, no, child! that was the first act. There are five of them; yes, that there are," she repeated, with a sigh, "five of them."

"Five of the same?" asked Petra.

"What do you mean, the same?"

"Do the same people come in and out, and the same things go on?"

"Why, surely you can never have been at a play before, can you?"

"No."

"No! Ah, well, it's true there are many places that have no theatre; it costs so much."

"But what is it all?" asked Petra, excitedly, and looking at her as if she could not wait her answer. "Who are these people?"

"They are Naso's company, and a wonderfully good company it is; he's such a clever manager."

"And does he make it all up? Or what is it all? For Heaven's sake, do tell me?"

"My dear child, don't you really know what a play is? Why, *where* can you have come from?"

But these last words brought to Petra's mind the memory of her native place, her shame, and her flight. She sank into silence, and did not venture to ask any more questions.

The second act came on, and with it the king; yes, it was certainly the king. So she had actually got to see a king! She did not hear what he was saying, nor see to whom he was talking; she was too busy observing the king's clothes, the king's bearing, the king's gestures. Her thoughts were not drawn from this till the young man came in. And now they all departed to fetch the bride; so she must again wait a while.

Between the acts the old dame leaned over to her, and whispered:

"Don't you think they're acting splendidly?"

"Acting!" said Petra, looking at her in amazement, "acting—what is that?"

She did not notice that all around were looking at her, and that the old woman had been egged on to ask; she did not hear them laughing at her as they sat there.

"Why don't they speak as we do?" she asked, as the old woman had made her no answer.

"That's because they're Danes," replied the other, and began to laugh anew.

Then Petra perceived that she was being laughed at for her many questions; so she sat silent, and looked steadily at the curtain.

When it rose again she had the great joy of seeing an archbishop, and, as before, grew so absorbed in watching him that she did not hear a word of what he was saying. Then there was the sound of music, faint in the distance, but it was coming nearer. There was song from women's voices, and the sound of flutes and violins, and of an instrument which was not a guitar, yet was like many guitars, only softer, fuller, and more mellow. The

harmonies mingled, and broke in long waves, and called up flowing visions of colors, and in came the procession: soldiers with halberds, choir boys with censers, monks with burning tapers, and the king with a crown on his head, and at his side the bridegroom, clad in white. Then came the white-clad girls again, strewing roses, singing songs, before the bride, who was clothed in white samite, and had a red wreath on her head; by her side walked a tall woman, in a robe of purple, with golden crowns worked over it, and a small crown of shining gold on her head: that must surely be the queen. The whole church was filled with music and color, and all that now took place—from the bridegroom leading the bride to the altar and kneeling before it, while all the rest kneeled round them, to the archbishop's entrance, surrounded by his train of priests—were merely fresh links in the chain of glowing music.

But just as the wedding ceremony was to begin, the archbishop raised his staff on high and forbade it; their marriage was forbidden by the laws of the Church: never, never in this life might they have one another. O God, have mercy! The bride fell swooning, and Petra, who had risen to

her feet, likewise fell back—and with a piercing shriek.

"Water! Bring water!" cried the people near her.

"No," answered the old dame, "it is not wanted; she has not fainted."

"It is not wanted," repeated others. "Silence there!"

"Silence!" came the cry from the stalls and pit. "Silence in the balcony!"

"Silence!" came the answer back from the balcony.

"You must not take it to heart so, dear," whispered the old woman, "it's only sham and acting; but, indeed, Madam Naso acts this part remarkably well."

"Silence!" cried Petra too, for she was already deep in the plot again. The fiendish monk had come in with a sword; the two lovers had to take up a piece of cloth and he cut it in twain between them, as the Church parts them asunder, as pain cuts into men's hearts, as of yore the sword above Paradise gate cut off return to it. Weeping women took the bride's red wreath and gave her a white one, which was to bind her to the cloister all the

days of her life. He whose she was for all time and eternity was to know her alive and never touch her hand; know her within those walls, and never see her. How heartrending was their farewell to one another! Surely never on earth was sorrow such as theirs!

"Good heavens!" whispered the old dame to her, as the curtain fell, "don't be so foolish, child; that's only Madam Naso, the manager's wife."

Petra looked at her with widely opened eyes. She thought the woman must be mad; and as that had long been the other's opinion of Petra, they gave up talking, but kept looking at one another out of the corners of their eyes.

When the curtain rose again, Petra no longer followed the play; for it was the bride she saw, within the cloister walls, and the bridegroom living night and day in desperation without them. She suffered their sufferings and joined in their prayers; what was actually going on before her eyes made no mark on her senses. Suddenly a foreboding silence recalled her to the stage: the empty church seemed to grow bigger and bigger: no sound was there but the clock striking twelve. A dull booming sound is coming from the vaulted

aisles; the walls tremble; tall and terrible the holy Olaf arises from his shrine in his cerecloth; spear in hand he comes striding along; the watchmen flee; out crashes the thunder; and the monk falls pierced through and through by the outstretched spear: then all is darkness, and the vision has passed away. But the monk lies there a heap of ashes, that the lightning has struck down.

Without being herself aware of it, Petra had clutched hold of the old lady, who had been rather frightened by her convulsive grasp, and now, seeing her turning paler and paler, hastened to speak.

"Goodness gracious, child! that's only Knutsen; this is the only part he can do well, because his voice is so thick."

"No, no, no!" said Petra; "I saw the light about his head, and the church tremble under his tread!"

"Will you be quiet there?" came from all directions; "put them out, if they can't be quiet."

"Silence in the balcony!" cries the pit.

"Silence in the pit!" cries the balcony in answer.

Petra shrunk away as if for shelter, but soon had

forgotten everything else, for the lovers were there again, the lightning had burst forth for their aid; let them fly now! They are with one another; they are embracing one another. Protect them now, thou God on high!

Suddenly breaks forth the sounds of shouting and of trumpets; the bridegroom is torn from her side to fight for his fatherland; he is wounded to death; dying, he greets his bride. Petra did not understand what had really happened until the bride comes quietly on—and sees his dead body! Then it is as if all the clouds of sorrow were gathered above that spot; but a gleam of light disperses them; the bride looks up from the dead man's breast and prays that God Almighty will let her die! Heaven opens at her glance, the lightning blazes forth; the bridal-chamber is up there on high—let the bride enter! Ah, truly, she can already see it, for from her eyes streams forth peace, like the peace on yonder lofty mountain. Her eyelids sink; the struggle has been rewarded with divine victory, their steadfast faith has its greater than earthly crown; she is with him now.

Long sat Petra silent, her heart uplifted in faith, her soul filled with the strength of their great

strength. She rose high above all that was petty, above all fear and grief; she rose with a smile for all, for all were her brothers and sisters. Evil that parts mankind no longer existed; it lay crushed to atoms beneath the Thunderer's spear. People who saw her smiled back at her, for this was she who had been half out of her senses during the play; but she saw nothing in their smile, save the reflection of the victory she herself had won. In the faith that they smiled in sympathy with her, she beamed back at them so radiantly that they were forced to smile with her feelings. She walked down the broad stairs between two moving rows of people, her joy shedding joy around her among them, the beauty that floated over her radiating beauty over them. The bright gleams within us are sometimes so mighty that we throw light on all around us, even though we ourselves can not see it. 'Tis the greatest triumph in this world to be heralded, borne along, and followed by one's own radiant thoughts.

When, without knowing how, she had got home again, she asked what it had all been. There were several people there who understood her, and whose answers helped her. And when she had

fully grasped what a play was, and what great actors were able to do, she rose up and said:

"That is the greatest calling on earth! I will be an actress!"

To the astonishment of all she put on her things and went out again; she felt she must be alone and in the open air. She walked away from the town and on to the cape near at hand, where the wind was blowing strong and fresh. The sea was thundering below, but the town lay a little way off, on both sides of the bay, with a misty glow above it, through which numberless isolated lights were struggling, without being able to do more than light up the veil they could not lift. It was an emblem of her soul, it seemed to her. The great dark ocean at her feet gave forth a hollow sound of warning from fathomless depths; either must she sink into them or join with those who were struggling to give light. She asked herself how it was that she had never before had such thoughts, and the answer came to her that it was because only the actual moment had sway with her; but she felt that at such moments she had indeed power. This, too, she saw: just so many moments would be given her as there were sparkling lights in the mist yon-

der, and she prayed God so to make them give full light that none of them might have been kindled by Him in vain.

She rose up, for the wind was now icy cold. She had not been away long; but when she came home again she knew what way she must henceforth tread.

Next morning she stood before the manager's door. She could hear a noise as of people loudly scolding within; one of the voices seemed to her to be like that of the bride of last night; it was true it was now speaking in a very different way, but still it had power to make Petra tremble. She waited for a long while, but as it never seemed likely to leave off, she knocked at the door.

"Come in!" cried the wrathful voice of a man. "Oh!" cried the woman's voice, and Petra opened the door to see a flying shape in a night-gown and with hair wild about her, disappearing in frightened haste by another door. The manager, a tall man with a pair of fierce eyes, over which he at once put on his gold-rimmed glasses, was excitedly walking up and down the room. His long nose so lorded it over his face that all the rest seemed

to be there for its sake; his eyes looked like two gun-barrels behind the ramparts, his mouth was the moat before it, and his forehead a light bridge from it to the forest or outworks.

"What do you want?" he asked gruffly, pausing in his march. "Is it you who want to be a chorus-girl?" he added abruptly.

"Chorus-girl? What is that?"

"Oh, you don't know what that is, I see; very well, then, what is it you want?"

"I want to be an actress."

"Oh, you want to be an actress, do you? And you don't even know what a chorus-singer is. I see. Well, but you speak a dialect."

"Dialect? What is that?"

"Oh, so you don't know what a dialect is, and you want to be an actress, do you? I see. Well, that is just like all Norwegians. By dialect, I mean that you don't speak as we do."

"No, but I've been trying to all this morning."

"Oh, have you? Come, come; let me hear you."

Petra struck an attitude, and said as the bride had the night before:

"I greet thee, sweet love, good-morrow to thee."

"Devil take it, I do believe you've come here to make fun of my wife!"

A peal of laughter came from the next room, and the manager opened the door and called out, without seeming to remember in the slightest that they had been engaged in mortal quarrel a moment before:

"Do come here, my dear, and look; here's a chit of a girl who's trying to caricature you."

The head of a woman with untidy, stubborn-looking black hair, black eyes, and a large mouth, did actually look into the room and laugh. Nevertheless Petra hurried up to her; for this must be the bride. "No," thought she, as she came nearer; "her mother, I suppose." She looked at the lady and said: "I really don't know—was it you? Or are you her mother?"

Now it was the manager's turn to laugh; the lady had drawn her head back, but continued to laugh from her room.

Petra's confusion was so strongly shown by her face, her bearing, the play of her features, that the manager began to look at her with more atten-

tion. He watched her for a moment, then took up a book and said, as if nothing in the world had taken place:

"Take this and read something, my lass; but read it just as you talk yourself."

She did so at once.

"No, no: that's idiotic; listen!" And he read aloud to her and she after him, reading exactly as he did.

"No, no; that's utterly wrong. Read Norse; d— it all, read Norse!" And Petra read aloud once more.

"No, I tell you, no! That's stark raving madness. Don't you understand what I say? Are you an idiot?"

She tried again and again, and he gave her another book.

"See now, that's just the opposite sort of thing; this is comic; read it!"

Petra read it, but with the same results, until at last he grew tired and cried out:

"Come, come, no more of this! Deuce take it, what do you want on the stage? Hang it all, what is it you want to be playing?"

"I want to act what I saw yesterday."

"Oh, do you? of course you do? Well, what then?"

"Why," she answered, much disconcerted, "it seemed to me yesterday as if it was all so splendid, but to-day I thought how much finer it would be if it could have a happy ending; so I wanted to alter—"

"Oh, so you wanted to alter, did you? I see. Well, there's nothing to prevent you. The writer is dead, so of course he can't correct it any more, and you who can neither speak nor read will naturally be able to improve his work. Yes, that's your Norwegian all over!"

Petra did not understand a word of all this, but she felt that it was going amiss with her, and she began to grow anxious.

"Mustn't I do it?" she asked him timidly.

"Oh, of course; there's nothing in the world to hinder you. In God's name, go and do it! Listen to me!" he said, suddenly changing his tone and walking straight up to her: "You have no more notion of acting than a cat. I have tried you both in tragedy and in comedy, and you have talent for neither. Because you've got a pretty face and a fine figure, people have put it into your head, I've

no doubt, that you can easily act far better than my wife, and so you want to play at once the greatest rôle in the *répertoire* and alter it into the bargain. Oh, well, that is just like your Norwegians; they are the people to do that kind of thing."

Petra had been drawing her breath quicker and quicker and now she could scarcely speak; at last she ventured to say in a low voice:

"May I really not be allowed to, then?"

He had got up and gone to the window, and thought that she was sure to have gone by now; he turned round in angry annoyance: but the sight of her consternation and the marvelously vivid way in which it was shown by her whole bearing made him pause for a moment; he suddenly darted upon a book, and in a voice and manner from which every trace of the past was again blotted out, he said:

"Take this; read this piece, and read it slowly, just to let me hear your voice. Now, read away."

But she could not read; she could not even see the letters.

"Come, don't be downhearted," he said.

At last she managed to read, but without warmth or spirit; he bade her read again, "with more feel-

ing"; this proved even worse than before. Then he quietly took the book from her and said:

"Now I've tried you in every possible way, so I feel I've nothing to reproach myself with. I assure you, my dear young lady, that if I were to send you or my boots upon the stage, it would make about the same impression—and a very remarkable one it would be. And that's enough now, I think."

But as a last effort, Petra plucked up courage to say:

"I think that I don't quite understand—but if I only could get to—"

"Oh, yes, yes of course! Every little fishing village knows far more about it than we do; the Norwegian public is the most enlightened one in the world. Come, come now, if you don't go, I shall."

She turned to the door and burst into tears.

"Listen," he said, for her strong feeling kindled a spark of sympathy in him; "was it not you who made a disturbance in the theatre last night?"

She turned red as fire and looked at him.

"Ah, I see it must have been. Now I know you—you're 'Fisher Girl.' After the play, I was with a gentleman from your native town—he knew

all about you. So that's why you want to go on the stage, is it? You want to try your arts there, do you? Very good. But listen to me: *my* theatre is a respectable place; I won't permit any attempts of that sort here. Now go! Be off with you, I say!"

But Petra was already through the doorway, bitterly sobbing as she went down the stairs and out into the street. She wept as she ran through the crowded thoroughfare, and a woman running weeping through the streets attracted, as was natural, considerable notice. Men stood still to look, little boys ran after her, and soon there was a crowd following; in the noise at her heels Petra heard the cries that had echoed through her attic, she could see the faces in the air again, and away she tore. But her recollection grew apace with every step she took, and so also did the noise behind her; when she had reached the house, closed the street door, got into her room and bolted the door, she flung herself into a corner and tried to ward off the eyes that were on her; she kept them off with her hands and with threatening gestures, until at last she sank down exhausted—and was saved.

That same afternoon, toward twilight, she was on her way from Bergen into the country. She did not know whither she was bound, but she was determined to go somewhere where she was not known. She sat in the dog-cart with her box tied on behind her and the driver sitting on it; it was raining in torrents as she sat crouching beneath a great umbrella and looking gloomingly out at the mountain above her and the precipices down below at her side. The forest in front of her was a dark mass of mist peopled with ghostly shapes; next moment she would be among them, but ever the dark haze kept moving backward as she drew nearer to it. A mighty crashing noise, growing louder every instant, added to her feeling of journeying through a mystic land, wherein everything had its own meaning and its dark connection with the rest, and where mortal man was but a timid wayfarer, who must use his eyes well if he wished to fare onward. The noise was the sound of many a waterfall that, swoolen by the rain, had grown to gigantic size and now plunged headlong from rock to rock, with a thundering roar. Their way frequently took them over narrow bridges, and she could see the water seething in the depths be-

low. Sometimes the path curled and wound about; here and there lay cultivated land with a few turf-thatched houses on it; then, again, their road went up the mountains and toward the crags and the forest. She was wet and very cold, but she meant to go on and on so long as there was daylight; next day she would go on still farther, and keep on going farther and farther inland, until at last she found some place where she dared trust herself. In this the Almighty God would help her, she felt, He who was now guiding her through the night and the tempest.

CHAPTER VIII

SIGNE AND HER PARENTS

AMONG the mountains of the Bergen district, in the sheltered and fertile valleys, a mild autumn sometimes brings warm summer-like days with it long after the fall of the year. At such times the cattle are turned out to pasture for a while in the middle of the day, even though they have already been put into their stalls for winter fodder; the beasts are then apt to get plump and fresh, and make a lusty show when they are brought back again in the afternoon to the farmstead.

Just as Petra was about to pass one of these farms the cattle were coming down the mountain-path; cows, sheep, and goats, lowing, baa-ing, and bleating, as they danced along into the large yard to the music of their bells. It was delicious weather, and the long white wooden building with

its tall windows stood glittering in the sunlight; the firs, the birches, the mountain-ash, and the wild cherry trees on the mountain above and the briers on the crags around stood so thick together that the house looked as if kept warm by them. A garden lay by the roadside in front of the main building; it was full of apple, pear, and cherry trees, and above them all towered some grand old ash trees with their spreading crowns. The house lay like a nest, hidden among green branches, and not to be approached by aught save the sun. But it was just this look of being hidden that awakened Petra's desire, and when the sun shone on the panes and the merry bells rang out alluringly, and Petra learned that the place belonged to a clergyman, she suddenly jerked at the reins, and crying out, "I must go in here," turned aside from the road and into the garden.

A pair of Finnish hounds flew forth barking as she drove into the courtyard, which was a large enclosed square, with cattle-sheds facing the main building, a wing of the dwelling-house on the right, and a wash-house and servants' rooms on the left. This space was now full of cattle, and in their midst stood a lady of middle height and

graceful build; she wore a close-fitting dress and a little silk kerchief on her head; round about her and almost upon her were goats—white goats, black goats, brown goats, pied goats—each with its little tuneful bell; she had a name for each of the goats, and something nice for them all in the bowl which the dairymaid kept filling for her. On the low steps which led from the main building into the yard stood the priest with a dish of salt in his hands, and in front of the steps stood the cows licking the salt from his hands and from the flag-stones on which he was strewing it. The priest was not a big man, but he was squarely built; his neck was short, his forehead narrow; his bushy eyebrows jutted out over his eyes—eyes that rarely looked straight at anything, but darted out deep side-glances every now and then. His hair was short, thick, and gray; it stood up all over his head, and grew nearly as thickly down on his neck as it did up above; he wore no neck-cloth, and his shirt, in which there was a collar-stud, was open so that his furry chest was bared to the air; nor were his wristbands fastened, so that they hung about the small, wiry, and just now very dirty hands with which he was giving the cattle salt;

his hands and arms alike were all covered with hair.

He gave a sharp, quick side glance at the stranger, who had now got down from the dog-cart and worked her way through the goats up to his daughter. It was not possible for him to hear what they were talking about, because of the kine, dogs, and goats; but he saw both of them were moving toward him, and, with the goats around them, they came up to the steps. A farm-lad drove the cattle off at a sign from the priest, and Signe, his daughter, called to him—and Petra could not fail to notice the sweetness of her voice:

"Father, here is a lady who is on a journey, and would like to rest a day with us."

"She is very welcome here!" cried the priest, and, giving the salt-dish to a servant, went into his own room, on the right side of the building —probably to cleanse himself and arrange his clothes.

Petra went with the young lady into the passage, which was really a hall, it was so airy and roomy; the post-boy was paid, her luggage brought in, and she herself shown into a room op-

posite the priest's study, where she made some little alteration in her dress before going out again into the passage to be taken to the family sitting-room.

What a large, bright room it was! Nearly the whole side that lay toward the garden was taken up with windows, the middle one being a glass door leading into it. The windows were broad and high, they ran almost down to the floor, and were filled with flowers; flowers stood on stands about the room; flowers stood on the window-sills; and for curtains, ivy trailed down from two small flower-pots which hung high up on the top of the window-frame. It was like going into a green-house built in the midst of a garden, for there were bushes and flowers outside, beside the wall, on it, and above it, and away on the land in front. And yet you forgot to look at the flowers before you had been in that room for one minute; it was the church you looked at, as it lay high up on that peaceful hill on your right, and the blue waters which mirrored its image and flowed shining far away among the mountains, so that you knew not whether it was a lake or an arm of the sea. And then those mountains themselves! Not isolated

peaks, but height upon height, the mighty masses standing one behind the other, as if here were the limit of land for human dwelling.

When at last Petra withdrew her eyes, the whole room seemed to her hallowed by the scene without; it was the pure and bright flower-frame for that magnificent picture. She felt that some invisible power was surrounding her, giving heed to her doings, yea, to her very thoughts; she walked about examining and touching the things around her without being aware of it. Her eye fell upon a painting above the sofa on the wall that faced the light; it was a full-length portrait of a lady, who seemed to be smiling down at her. She sat with her head slightly aside, her hands folded, and her right arm resting on a book, on the cover of which was painted in legible letters the title, "Sunday Book." Her fair, shining hair, and clear skin seemed to beam down a Sabbath calm upon all on whom her eye fell. Her smile was earnest with the earnestness of resignation. She seemed to have the power of drawing every one near to her in bonds of love; she seemed to understand every one, for in all she saw only all that was good. Her face bore the marks of suffering, but that suffer-

ing must have been her strength, for assuredly no one could ever have dared to have pained such a one. A wreath of immortelles hung over the frame: she was dead!

"That was my mother," said a soft voice behind Petra, and she turned and saw the daughter, who had gone out and come back again. And now the whole room seemed filled with the portrait; everything led up to it; everything took its color from it; everything else was placed there for its sake; and the daughter herself was a calm reflection of it. Something quieter the latter seemed, a trifle more reserved. The mother welcomed every look and returned it with glad thanks; the daughter's eyes dropped beneath another's; but there was the same mildness and gentleness in her glance. She had also her mother's figure, but without any trace of weakness; on the contrary, the quick colors in her close-fitting dress, in her apron and her little kerchief with its Roman pin, gave her appearance a bright look of health and a gracefulness and a sense for it that made her alike the daughter of the portrait and the fairy of the place. As she walked among her mother's flowers, Petra felt strongly drawn toward her. With this girl's

friendship, and in that homestead, all that was good in her would surely develop! Ah, if she could only stay within it! She felt doubly her desolation, and her eyes now followed Signe as she walked about and as she stood still. Signe perceived this and tried to avoid her eyes, but this availing her nothing, she grew disconcerted and bent down over her flowers.

At length, Petra saw how rudely she was behaving, and would have made a shamefaced apology; but there was something in the carefully arranged hair, the delicate forehead, and the close-fitting dress, that warned her to beware of what she did. She looked up at the mother. Ah! *she,* she felt, would long ago have embraced her! Was it not even now as if she were bidding her welcome? Dared she trust to that? No one had ever looked at her so before. In that look she could read that the mother knew all that had befallen the poor wanderer, and could forgive it all. Petra's heart was yearning for kindness, and she could not move from beneath those kind eyes. She leaned her head to one side and folded her hands like the portrait, and turned round thus almost without being conscious of it.

"Let me stay here," came from her lips.

Signe raised herself and turned toward her, unable to speak for astonishment.

"Let me stay here!" begged Petra again, and took a step toward her, "it's so lovely here!" and the tears stood in her eyes.

"I will ask father to come," said Signe, and Petra followed her with her eyes till she disappeared through the study door. But the moment she was alone, fear fell upon her for what she had done, and she trembled when she saw the priest's astonished face in the doorway. He came in, somewhat more neatly dressed than before, and with a pipe, which he held tightly in his hand and took from between his lips after every whiff, blowing out the smoke in three puffs, each with a little sigh of appreciation. He did this several times as he stood in the middle of the room in front of Petra, not looking at her, but evidently waiting for her to speak. But she did not dare to repeat her request in this man's presence, for he looked so grave and stern.

"You wish to remain here, do you?" he asked at last, and flashed a sharp, quick side glance at her.

"I have nowhere to go to," she answered, her voice trembling with nervousness.

"Where do you come from?"

In a low voice Petra told him her name and that of her town.

"Why have you come here?"

"I do not know—I am looking for—I will pay for myself—I— Oh, I don't know!" She turned aside and for a moment could get no further; then plucking up heart again she went on:

"I will do all you ask me, if only I may stay here and not have to travel on any more—and not have to ask any more favors."

The daughter had come in again with her father and was by the fireplace, where she stood with downcast eyes and hands busy among the withered rose-leaves. The priest made no answer; there was no sound save the puffs from his pipe, as he stood looking at Petra, his daughter, and the portrait.

Now it often happens that the same object produces widely different impressions in different people, and while Petra was silently praying the portrait to make him lenient to her, to him it seemed that it was whispering: "Protect our

child! let no unknown stranger be her companion!" He turned round to Petra with a sharp side glance:

"No!" he said, "you can not stay here!"

Petra turned pale, heaved a violent, deep sigh, looked wildly around her, and darting into an adjacent room, the door of which stood half open, she flung herself down by the table and gave way to all her grief and bitter disappointment! Father and daughter looked at one another; her want of manners in thus bursting into another room and seating herself there alone and unasked, could only be equaled by her conduct in coming in from the highway, begging to be allowed to stay there, and then bursting out crying when refused. The priest went after her; not to talk to her, but, on the contrary, to shut the door behind her. He came back, his face all flushed, and said softly to his daughter, who was still standing by the stove:

"Did you ever see the like of this woman? Who is she? What is it she wants?"

The daughter did not at once answer, but when she did, she said in a still lower tone than her father:

"She behaves very oddly, but there's something very singular about her."

The priest paced up and down, looking at the door. At length he paused, and said under his breath:

"I don't think she can have all her wits about her, do you?" and as Signe made no answer, he came nearer and repeated more decidedly: "She is mad, Signe, half-crazy, in fact: that's what's singular about her."

He began to walk up and down again, and thoughts of other things came into his mind so that he had nearly forgotten what he had last said, when his daughter at last softly replied:

"I don't think she can be mad," she said, "but she is certainly very unhappy," and she bent her head again over the dry rose-leaves among which her fingers were busy.

Neither her movements nor the tone of her voice would have struck anybody else as noticeable, but her father was straightway an altered man as he walked up and down, looking at the portrait, and at last said in very low tones:

"Do you think then, because she's unhappy, that mother would have asked her to stay?"

"Mother would not have answered for some days," answered the daughter in a whisper, as she bent still lower over the rose-leaves.

The slightest remembrance of the mother up there, when the daughter thus brought it before him, was enough to make that shaggy lion's head mild as a lamb's. He felt at once the truth of what she said, and stood before her like a boy at school caught cribbing. He forgot to smoke; he left off walking about. At last he whispered:

"Shall I ask her to stay a few days?"

"You've already given her your answer."

"Yes; but it's one thing to let her live here and another to let her stay a few days."

Signe seemed to be thinking for a while, and then she said:

"Well, you must do what you think best."

The priest was still considering what he had best do as he walked up and down, puffing away vigorously; suddenly he came to a halt.

"Will you go in to her, or shall I?" he said.

"It would be better if you went in, of course," answered the daughter with a loving look.

He was just going to turn the handle of the door,

when a peal of laughter rang out from the room at the other side of it; then there was silence for a moment—then peal upon peal burst forth again. The priest, who had moved back a little, now hurried forward and his daughter after him; surely their strange guest must have suddenly fallen into hysterics.

When the door was opened they saw Petra sitting where she had flung herself down, with a book before her, over which she had dropped without being aware of it. Her tears had fallen over its leaves; she saw this and was trying to wipe them off, when her eye was caught by a vulgar expression which she had often enough heard at the time when she ran wild in the streets, but which she thought nobody would ever have dared to print. In her amazement she forgot to weep, but sat staring at the book. Why, what could all this mad stuff be?

She read on with open mouth: it grew worse and worse; it was so coarse and yet so irresistibly funny that she could not help going on reading. She read till she forgot all else; she read herself away from pain and grief, from time and place, with old Father Holberg; for of course it

was his work! She burst out laughing, she began to roar with laughter—even now, when the priest and his daughter stood by her, she failed to see their grave faces or to remember what she had begged of them. But she went on laughing as she asked:

"What is this? what in the world can this be?" and turned to the title-page.

Then the color left her cheeks as she looked up at them and down again at the well-known handwriting. There are things which strike upon the heart like a rifle-shot; things which we think we have fled hundreds of miles from, and find lying right in front of us—here on the first page stood written: "Hans Oedegaard."

"Is the book *his?*" cried Petra, all the blood burning up in her cheeks again. "Is *he* coming here?" she cried, getting up.

"He has promised to," answered Signe—and then Petra called to mind that there was a priest and his family in the Bergen diocese with whom he had been when abroad; she had only been journeying in a circle then, and it had led her back to him.

"Is he coming soon, do you think? Or is he al-

ready here?" And she got up at once as if to make her escape.

"No, indeed, for he's ill," said Signe.

"Ah, yes, of course! he's ill," repeated Petra sadly, and sank down again.

"But tell me," cried Signe, "are not you the—"

"—Fisher Girl?" said the priest, finishing the sentence.

"Yes," said Petra, looking up at them beseechingly. "Yes, I am the Fisher Girl."

They knew her well enough here; for, indeed, Oedegaard used to talk of nothing else.

"That alters the case," said the priest. He felt that something must have gone amiss, and that friendly help was needed. He added: "Remain here for the present."

Petra looked up and marked the look with which Signe thanked him; that was so sweet to her that she went back, took both Signe's hands in hers —she dared go no further—and said with a deep blush, "I will tell you all as soon as we two are alone."

An hour later Signe had heard all Petra's story and told it her father. By his advice she wrote

that very day to Oedegaard and kept writing to him all the while Petra remained in the house.

When Petra that night lay down to rest in her big warm bed, in a comfortable room with the birch wood crackling in the hearth and the New Testament between the two candles on the spotless table by the bed, she took the book into her hands and thanked God for everything, yes, for evil as well as for good.

As a young man with an ardent spirit and natural powers of eloquence, Signe's father had made up his mind to become a clergyman; his parents, who were wealthy people, had been much against it; they would much rather have had him choose what they called an independent calling; but their opposition only increased the strength of his desire, and when he had finished his education at home, he went abroad to continue his studies. It happened during a preliminary sojourn in Denmark that he often met a young lady who belonged to a sect whose views were not so austere as his own, and which he was therefore much opposed to; consequently he was ever endeavoring to work

upon her; but the way in which she looked at him and thus silenced him was never out of his mind during his stay abroad. As soon as he came back, he went and visited her. They were constantly together again, and each so grew in the other's favor that they got engaged, and shortly after were married.

Now it became clear to them that they each had had a secret plan for the other; he had thought to draw her into his sterner creed, and she had felt such childlike confidence in her power to bring his strength and his eloquence to the service of her community. The first very gentle attempt on his part was met by one of the same sort on hers; he drew back disappointed and mistrustful. She quickly enough perceived that, and from that day forth he went on his guard against attempts on her part, she against his. But neither of them ever made another; for both had grown alarmed. He feared his own passionate nature; she, lest by failure she should throw away her chance of winning him over; for the hope of so doing she never gave up—it had become the end and aim of her life. But the contest never came; for, in her presence, strife was not possible.

His active temperament and hardly restrained passions were, however, bound to find some outlet, and this they did each time he went up into the pulpit and saw her sitting beneath him. His congregation was drawn in with him into a whirlpool, and as he made them feel his excitement, so they in turn made him feel theirs. She saw this and bade her fearful heart find ease in kindly acts, and in her daughter, when after a while she became a mother; her she took in her bodily and spiritual embrace and bore her away to be the companion of her solitude. On the child's innocence she bestowed her own dear hopes; from her, received them back; in her, nurtured them; with her she held love's banquet, and came back from it to him, the strong, stern man, with the double sweetness of womanhood and Christianity upon her, so that it was not possible for him to say anything that might trouble her. He could not help loving her more than the whole world beside, and the more tenderly he loved her, the more his whole soul was permeated with the yearning to help her to the eternal salvation. Quietly the mother's right withdrew the child from his religious instruction, so that the child's songs, the child's questionings

were but a fresh source of pain to him; but when he was stung up in the pulpit to bitter and violent excitement, his housemate only welcomed him home again with somewhat more gentleness than usual; her eyes indeed spoke, but her mouth uttered never a word. And his little daughter clung to his hands and looked up at him with her mother's eyes.

Of all things they talked in this household, save of the one thing that lay at the bottom of all their thoughts. But tension such as this could not endure very long. The mother continued to smile, it is true, but only because she did not dare let herself weep. When the time came for the daughter to be prepared for confirmation, and it was his turn now, by right of his office, to take charge of her religious instruction, which till now the mother, by right of hers, had done, the strain reached its utmost; and after the sermon to the candidates for confirmation, and the reading out of their names, the mother became ill much as other people get tired. She smiled as she said that now she could no longer walk, and some days later, smiling as before, she told them she could no longer sit up. She liked to have her daughter

constantly by her; though she could no longer talk to her, she could at least see her.

And the daughter knew what the mother liked best. She read to her from the Book of Life, and sang the hymns of her childhood, the new, quickening psalms of her community. It was long before the priest fully grasped what was about to happen; but when he *did,* all other thoughts left him save one—let her but speak to him, if only a word or two; but she could not; she was no longer able to talk. He stood at the foot of the bed, looking at her and praying to God. She smiled at him and he fell on his knees, and, taking his daughter's hand, placed it in hers, as if to say: "Here, keep her; she shall be thine forever!" Then she smiled as she never had before—and in that smile her soul fled.

It was long before the priest could be got to talk again; another was appointed to look after his flock, and he himself went about from place to place, from room to room, as if seeking something. He walked softly; when he spoke, it was in a subdued tone; and it was only by dropping into all his quiet ways that his daughter was gradually able to become the companion of his heart. Now she

began to help him in his search: every word of the mother was called up again, and "what *she* would have wished" became henceforth the standard of his life. The daughter's constant intercourse with her—to which he had remained a stranger—became now for the first time his life too. From the earliest times that she could remember as a child, everything was gone over again; her hymns were sung, her prayers prayed, the sermons she had most loved read over one after another, and her comments and explanations of them deeply pondered.

Thus actively employed again, the desire came upon him to go to the spot where first he had met her, and try to follow in her footsteps the path she had trodden. Himself a beginner in this new life, his senses were open to all the beginnings around him—the great national, the lesser political ones—and these brought back to him his own young vigor. His strength, and with it his desire, came flooding back on him; but now he was burning to proclaim the Word, so that it might fit men for Life and not alone for Death.

Before shutting himself up again in his parish among the mountains with his great work, he

yearned to take a wider survey of all without him. So they traveled far and wide and now rested at home again, full of memories of great things.

Such were they among whom Petra now lived.

CHAPTER IX

SMOKE, FIRE, AND SNOW

In the third year of her stay, one Friday a few days before Christmas, the two girls were sitting together in the evening twilight; the priest had just come in with his pipe. The day had gone by like most of the others in these last two years; it had been begun with a walk, then breakfast, and after that an hour's singing and playing, followed by language lessons or other studies and occupations about the house. In the afternoon each went to her own room. Signe happened that particular day to have been writing to Oedegaard, after whom Petra never inquired; nor, indeed, could she bear any reference to past times. Toward evening they went for a sledge-ride, and then came back to talk together, to sing, and later to read aloud. For this the priest always came in; he read remarkably well, and his daughter not less so. Petra

learned both their way of reading, paying particular attention to the way they spoke. Signe's voice and accent had such a charm for her that it seemed to echo in her ears when she was by herself; but Petra had such a high esteem for Signe that a man would have considered her madly in love with himself for a quarter as much; indeed, she often made Signe blush. Either the priest or Signe was in the habit of reading aloud every evening—for Petra could not be prevailed upon to read—and they had thus gone through all the masterpieces of Norse literature and were gradually working their way into those of other lands, reading for preference dramatic poetry. Just as they were about to light the lamps to begin that evening, a girl came in from the kitchen and said that there was a man outside with a message for Petra. It turned out to be a sailor from her native place. Her mother had made him promise to visit her when he went to those parts; he had walked a matter of seven miles and had to start off again at once, as the ship would soon be sailing. Petra went part of the way too; she wanted to have some further talk with him, as he was a reliable man and she had known him before.

The evening was somewhat dark: there was no light in the farmstead nor in any of the windows, except in the laundry, where they were busy washing; nor was there any light along the road, and the way was scarce visible until the moon had struggled over the mountain-tops. But she walked along through the forest fearlessly, spite of the ugly-looking shadows among the firs. One piece of news in especial had made her want to walk with the sailor. He had told her that Pedro Ohlsen's mother was dead, and that Pedro himself had sold the house and moved up to Gunlaug's, where he lived in Petra's room. This had happened nearly two years before, but her mother had never said a word about it. Now Petra could guess who it was that wrote her mother's letters, a question she had often asked her without ever getting any answer; but every letter always ended with these words: "With greetings from the writer of this."

The sailor had been bidden to ask how long she meant to stay at the parsonage, and what she meant to do afterward? To the first of these questions, Petra answered that she did not know; to the second, that he was to say to her mother there was but

one thing in the world she wished to be, and if she could not be that, she would be miserable all her life; but for the present she might not say what that was.

While Petra was walking along with the sailor and talking to him, the priest and Signe remained in the sitting-room talking of her, in whom they both had such joy. The farm-bailiff came in meanwhile and, after giving his account of the day's doings, asked whether either of them knew that the strange young lady was in the habit of going up and down from her room at night by a rope-ladder? He had to repeat it three times, for neither of them understood what he meant; he might just as well have been saying that she was in the habit of going up and down on the rays of the moon. The room was all dark, and there was not a sound in it; even the priest's pipe was inaudible. At last he was forced to speak, and in a heavy voice he asked:

"Who saw her?"

"I myself did. I was up yonder looking after the horses; it might have been about one o'clock."

"She went down on a rope-ladder, you say?"

"And up again."

There was another long pause. Petra's room was in the upper part of the house, in a corner that looked out on the lane. She was the only person up there, for nobody else had a room in that part of the building; there could therefore be no mistake.

"She must have walked in her sleep," said the man, turning to go.

"But she can not have made a rope-ladder in her sleep," said the priest.

"No, that's what I thought; so I thought it was best to tell you about it, sir. I have said nothing to any one else."

"Has any one but you seen it?"

"No—but if you doubt me, sir, the rope-ladder will be a proof; if that's not up there, my eyes must have seen false."

Up rose the priest at once.

"Father!" cried Signe.

"Bring the light!" answered the priest, in a tone that admitted no resistance.

"Father!" cried Signe, once more, as she lighted the candle herself and handed it to him.

"Yes, I'm her father, as well as yours, so long

as she's in my house; it's my duty to look after her."

The priest walked first with the light, Signe and the bailiff following. Everything in the little room was in order, save that on the table by the bed lay a heap of books, one open on the top of another.

"Does she read at night?"

"I don't know; but she never puts out her light *before* one o'clock."

Signe and her father looked at one another. All separated for the night at the parsonage between ten and half-past, and they met again in the morning between six and seven.

"Do you know anything of this?" asked the father.

Signe made no reply, but the bailiff, who was on his knees groping about in a corner of the room, answered from where he knelt:

"Anyway, she's not alone."

"What's that you're saying?"

"There's always some one with her talking to her; sometimes they talk very loud, for I've heard her both begging and threatening. She's in somebody's power, you may be sure, poor creature!"

Signe turned away, and the priest was pale as death.

"And here's the ladder," continued the man, as he drew it forth and held it up.

Two clothes-lines had been put side by side and a third tied to one of them, passed over the other and knotted, then knotted to the other half an ell lower down, and so on till they formed a perfect ladder. They examined it closely.

"Was she away long?" asked the priest.

"Away? How do you mean?" said the bailiff.

"Was she long gone, when she had got down?"

Signe stood trembling with cold and fright.

"She did not go away at all; she went down and up again."

"Up again! Who was it went away, then?"

Signe made a sudden movement and burst out weeping.

"There could not have been any one with her when I saw her yesterday evening."

"There was no one on the ladder, you say, but her?"

"No."

"And she went down and then up again?"

"Yes."

"She must have wanted to try it," said the priest, and breathed a little more freely.

"Before she let any one else use it," added the bailiff.

"You think, then," said the priest, looking at him, "this is not the first she has made?"

"No; else how could she have had people up there with her?"

"Have you known long that she had any one with her?"

"Not before this winter, when she began to use lights; it never struck me to come down here before."

"What!" said the priest sternly, "you have known of this the whole winter? Then why did you not speak of it sooner?"

"I thought that it must have been some one of the household who was with her; it was only when I saw her yesterday night on the ladder that I suspected it to be somebody else. Of course if I had thought of that sooner, I would have told you of it sooner."

"Yes, yes; it's evident enough she has deceived us all!"

Signe looked up at him entreatingly.

"She ought not to be so far off from all the rest of the household, perhaps," put in the bailiff as he rolled up the ladder.

"She ought not to be in this house at all after this," said the priest, and he turned to go, the others following; but when he had come down and put the lamp on the table, Signe came and flung herself into his arms.

"Yes—yes, my child," was all he could say to her, "this is a grievous disappointment."

A little later, as Signe was sitting in the corner of the sofa with a handkerchief before her eyes, and the priest was walking restlessly up and down, pipe in hand, they heard noisy screams from the kitchen, quick steps on the stairs, and the sounds of hurry and confusion in the passage overhead. They both hastened out. Petra's room was on fire! A spark from their candle must have fallen into the corner—for it was from that direction the fire came—and in an instant set fire to the hangings. The woodwork of the window was just on the point of catching fire, when a passer-by saw the flames from the road and rushed in and told the people at work in the laundry. The fire was soon put out; but in the country, where everything goes its even

way—year in, year out—it needs but a slight excitement to arouse people's minds. Fire, their greatest and most terrible foe, is never out of their thoughts, so that when it does thrust up its head from the depths below, licking its lips as it hisses and roars for its prey, they fall into trembling fear and have no peace for weeks; indeed, some of them never rest quietly again.

When the priest and his daughter were together again in the sitting-room and had lighted the lamps, both felt it as a sort of discomforting omen that Petra's room should thus have been straightway annihilated and every token and reminder of her burned up. At that moment they heard Petra's clear voice questioning and exclaiming. She darted up and down the stairs, ran from bedroom to passage, from passage to kitchen, and then came dashing into the sitting-room, still in her outdoor clothes.

"Goodness gracious!" she cried, "my room's been burned out!"

Nobody answered, but, without a pause, she ran on:

"Who's been up here? When did it happen? How did the fire start?"

To this the priest replied that it was he who had been up there; they had been looking for something—and so saying, he eyed her narrowly. Petra did not show the least sign of astonishment, and still less did she show any fear of what they might have seen. It gave her no misgivings that Signe did not look up from her sofa-corner; she thought that merely arose from the shock the fire had been to her, and went on asking how it was discovered, how put out, who had been there first —and, not getting quick enough answers to all her questions, rushed out again as she had entered. She came dashing in again with her walking things half off, half on, and told the priest and Signe all that had happened, and how she herself had seen the flames and ran on in great terror, but was glad now to find that it was no worse. As she spoke, she took off the rest of her outdoor things, took them out of the room and, coming back, took a seat by the table, never leaving off telling them what this one had said, that one done, etc.; the whole place was turned upside down, and this she seemed to find very amusing. As the others still continued silent, she bewailed that the fire had spoiled the evening for them all; for she so enjoyed

what they had been lately reading aloud—"Romeo and Juliet"—that she had meant to ask Signe that very evening to read to her again the scene she thought most beautiful of all—Romeo's parting from Juliet on the balcony.

In the midst of her flood of talk came in one of the maids from the wash-house and said that they were in want of clothes-lines; there was a bundle of them missing.

Petra turned suddenly fiery red, and started up, crying, "I know where they are, I'll go and get them;" but before she had got far she remembered the fire, paused, and said, amid her blushes, "Goodness gracious, they are sure to have been burned; they were in my room!"

Signe had turned toward her, the priest was eying her with his piercing sidelong glance.

"What did you want clothes-lines for?" he asked, and his breath came so quick and short that he could scarce get out the words.

As Petra looked at him, his terrible earnestness made her half afraid for one instant, and the next half tempted her to burst out laughing. She struggled against this impulse for a moment, but as her eyes fell on him again, such a peal of laugh-

ter rang out from the depths of her heart that it was useless for her to try to check it; but there was no more sign of a guilty conscience in her laughter than there is in that of a rippling brook. Signe could hear that from the sound of her voice, and sprang up from the sofa, crying out:

"What is it all? what is it?"

Petra turned, laughed, dashed away, ducked her head down and made for the door. But Signe had planted herself in the way, still crying out, "What is it all about? Tell me, Petra dear."

Petra hid her face on Signe's breast, as if to prevent herself being seen, but still went on laughing without stopping.

Now guilt does not behave thus, and the priest himself could not fail to see this. He, who was gathering himself up but a moment before to tower aloft in indignant anger, slipped down instead into merry laughter, drawing Signe along with him, for nothing in the world is more catching than laughter, especially laughter for which there seems to be no reason. The vain attempts that the priest and Signe kept making to find out what they were laughing at only added to the fulness of their

mirth; the maid-servant, who was in the room waiting for her answer, could at last hold out no longer, but burst forth into a loud guffaw; she had a big, coarse laugh that she felt to be out of keeping with such fine folks and furniture, so she hastened to the door and gave full swing to her merriment in the kitchen. Of course she carried the contagion with her there, and straightway a perfect storm of laughter burst in upon them from the kitchen, where they knew even less than the others what there was to laugh at, and this set them off laughing again in the parlor.

When, at length, they were nearly worn out with laughing, Signe made a last attempt to find out the cause of it.

"Come now, you *shall* tell me!" she cried, as she held Petra's hands tightly.

"No, no—not for anything in the world!"

"Oh, yes, you shall! You see, I know already what it is!" cried the other.

Petra looked at her and burst out laughing again; but Signe went on:

"Father knows, too!"

This time Petra did not laugh, she actually yelled with merriment; she tore herself from

Signe's grasp, and made for the door, but Signe got hold of her again. Petra turned round to try to wrest herself free, for get away she would and must at any price. She kept on laughing during her struggles, but there were tears in her eyes now. Then Signe let her go—out dashed Petra—and after her, Signe; both of them darted into Signe's room.

There Signe threw her arms round Petra's neck, and Petra clasped her closely.

"Goodness gracious! do you both know it?" she whispered.

"Yes; we went up there with the bailiff; he had seen you—and we found the rope-ladder!"

There was another scream from Petra and another attempt at flight, but this time only as far as the corner of the sofa, where she hid her face in the cushion while Signe, leaning over her, whispered into her ear all about their voyage of discovery and its burning consequences. What had cost her but a short while before so many tears and so much anxiety, seemed now such a merry matter that she told the story very humorously. Petra alternately listened and stopped her ears; looked up and hid her face again. When Signe

had done, and both of them were sitting there in the darkness, Petra whispered:

"Do you know, Signe, what it all means? I can't possibly manage to get to sleep when we go to our rooms at ten o'clock, for whatever we happen to have been reading always makes too much impression on me for that; so I learn by heart all that I like best in it. In this way I have learned whole scenes, and I say them aloud when I'm alone. When we came to 'Romeo and Juliet' I thought it the finest thing ever written; it made me crazy and wild, and I felt I *must* try the rope-ladder. I had never imagined before that one could go up and down on such a thing; so I got hold of some ropes—and that scamp of a bailiff must have been down below at the time and seen me! Oh, its nothing to laugh at, Signe! It's so tomboyish! I shall never be anything but a tomboy, Signe—and now, of course, I shall be the talk of the whole place to-morrow!"

But Signe, who had burst out laughing again, fell upon her with kisses and caresses, and rushed out of the room, screaming:

"Father must know of this; father must be told!"

"Are you mad, Signe?" cried Petra, and the one dashed off after the other so that they came flying into the room as they had flown out of it.

They almost knocked over the priest, who was just about to come and see what had become of them. Signe began her story, and Petra darted out again; but the moment she got outside the door she felt that she ought to have stopped in the room, just to hinder Signe telling. She tried to get in again, but the priest held the door fast, and it was no good her trying to move it, so she thumped on it with both hands from the outside, yelled and stamped on the floor to drown Signe's voice, who only talked all the louder for it. Not till the priest had heard the whole story, and was laughing as loudly and merrily as Signe at the new method of studying the classics, did he open the door; but then Petra scudded off.

After supper, at which Petra was present and had been properly teased by the priest, she was made to recite, by way of punishment, what she had learned by heart. She showed them that she really did know all the best scenes she had heard read, and not single parts alone, but all in the

piece. While reciting them, at times her enthusiasm seemed about to blaze forth, but she quickly smothered it. As soon as the priest observed this, he bade her put more feeling into it; but she only used the more repression. She went on and on, and they kept at it for hours; she knew the comic scenes as well as she knew the tragic, the mirthful ones as well as the serious. Her memory both astonished and amused them; she laughed, too, as she bade them try also.

"I could wish that the poor actors had but an eighth part of your powers, dear," said Signe.

"God keep her from ever taking to acting," said the priest with a sudden deep earnestness.

"Why, father; surely you don't think that our Petra could ever dream of such a thing?" said Signe, laughing. "I only spoke of it because I have always noticed that a person who has been acquainted with the poetry of his own land from early youth has never any wish to go on the stage, while one who knows very little of poetry until he has grown up often yearns to do so. It is a longing, suddenly stirred up, that leads them astray."

"That is very true. A really cultivated person seldom goes on to the stage."

"And still more seldom a person with a real feeling for poetry?"

"Yes, and when he does it is generally due to some fault in his character which lets vanity and frivolity get the upper hand of him. Both in my student years and when I was on my travels I got to know a good many actors, but I have never known, nor met any one who knew, one that led a really Christian life. I have come across some who felt drawn toward it, it is true; but there is something so exciting and turbulent in their work that they never seem able to quietly collect their thoughts, even long after they have left off. When I have talked with them about it, they have themselves admitted it and bewailed it. 'But then,' they have always added, 'we must console ourselves with the thought that we are not worse than a good many others.' But that I call a pitiable consolation, and a calling which can in nowise be made to help us to the Christian's life—a sinful calling. God help them, and keep all that are pure in heart from it!"

Next day—Saturday—the priest was up very

early, as usual. He strolled round among his laborers, struck out a bit beyond the farm, and came home again at daybreak. Just as he was going by the house into the yard, his eye fell on an open copy-book, or something of the sort, which had most likely been thrown out of Petra's window the evening before, and not been seen again owing to its being of the same color as the snow. He picked up the book and took it in with him to his study; as he spread it out to dry it, he saw that it was an old French exercise-book, in which verses had since been written. He was not thinking of looking at the verses, when his eye was caught by the word "actress" written up and down, along and across, in corners and down whole pages—he could see the word even among the verses. He sat down and looked into the thing more closely. There was one set of verses which had been altered and corrected time upon time, and which even in the last version stood full of corrections, but was at any rate legible:

"One thing, dear book, I'll trust to thee,
'Tis the one thing I mean to be:
An actress; it shall be my part,
To show the world a woman's heart,

Why she weeps and why she smiles,
All her joy and all her strife,
All her truth and all her wiles,
Every passion of her life.
God on high I kneel to Thee:
Grant me this one thing to be."

A little further on there stood written:

"Can I not thus, Lord, do Thy will?
Can I not be Thy servant still?"

A little further on some lines, evidently suggested by a poem they had read together some months before:

"O I would that I were an Elfin fair,
An Elfin fair;
I'd ride upon moonbeams and sport in the air,
Sport in the air!
And flit to and fro at my own sweet will,
My own sweet will;
And all who dared spy at me quickly I'd kill,
Quickly I'd kill.
—— —— no, that would be wicked, tho'—lirum,
Lirum, la!"

There came many scratched-out lines, corrections, sketches, notes, and then:

"Tra, la, la—wouldn't it be fun
To dance with all alike and never care for one?
Tra, la, la—wouldn't it be fun
To have them all come after me while I would favor none?"

Then came a letter in neat, clear handwriting:

"DEAREST HEINRICH—Don't you think that you and I are the cleverest of the whole lot? This will be the cause of a good deal of trouble to us both, but what does that matter? I permit you to have the honor of taking me to the masquerade to-morrow evening; I have never yet been there, you must know, and I long for some real mad trick or another, for everything in this house is so terribly quiet and dreary.

"You are a sad scamp, Heinrich. What are you up to now, I wonder? Here sit I, Your own,

PERNILLE."

The last thing that the priest read was some verses written again and again in plain,

clear writing; she had evidently copied them from some book, and had wanted to learn them by heart:

"Mighty thoughts my heart are filling,
Feeling high my bosom thrilling;
Thoughts far greater than my strength,
Feelings more than I can bear;
O my Saviour, come at length,
Thou who conqueredst pain and care,
Help me, Christ, my thoughts to tell,
Draw them from their silent well;
Lord, in pity help thou me,
Loki bind, set Balder free."

Many other things were written in the book, but the priest read no farther.

So it was to be a play-actress that this girl had come into his house and got his daughter to teach her. This was the secret purpose for which she listened to them with such eagerness every night as they read aloud; this was why she learned it all off by heart, was it? She had been tricking them the whole while, and even yesterday, when she made believe to explain everything, there was

something she was hiding from them; even while she was laughing her merriest, she was lying.

And that secret purpose of hers! That career which the priest had so often condemned in her hearing, *she* dared to adorn with the title of God's call to her and to ask him to bless it. A life full of outward shows and vanities, deceitfulness and passionate excesses, idleness and sensuality, lying and instability, a life over which hovered birds of prey as over carrion—was this the life which she yearned to devote herself to, and besought God to hallow? was this the life to which the priest and his daughter were destined to help her, there in that peaceful parsonage, under the stern watchful eye of that God-fearing fellowship of Christian folk?

When Signe came in, fresh and bright as the winter morning, to wish her father good-morning, she found his study full of smoke. This was always a sign of his being in perplexity, but it was doubly so when it happened at such an early hour. He said not a word to her, but he handed her the book. At once she saw that it was Petra's; the recollection of yesterday evening's suspicion and

grief came over her; she dared not look inside it, and her heart beat so violently, that she was forced to sit down. But the same word that had first caught her father's notice, met her eye too; she could not help looking further into the book and reading on. Her first feeling was one of shame—not shame for Petra, but shame at the thought that her father should have been forced to see this. But it was not long before she felt the deep humiliation that comes of finding one's self deceived by those one loves. For a moment it seems as if they have been cleverer, sharper, more dexterous than we, and a veil of mysterious power seems to wrap them round. But presently the soul begins to glow with indignant wrath; honor wields its sway over powers which are not mysterious, though unseen; we feel we are strong enough to shatter at a blow a hundred such petty tricks of cunning; what but a moment before humiliated us we now despise.

Petra was at the piano in the sitting-room, and her voice broke in upon them as she sang:

"O Life it is joy, for the Sun-king has shone,
And the doubt-clouds of darkness are scattered and gone,

And the hills are ablaze
With the Sun's bright rays,
And 'Up, up, up,' cries the bird in the grove,
And 'Up, up, up,' cries my love—
'Up, up with Hope and the Sun.' "

Then suddenly tumultuous music swelled forth from the piano, and out burst Petra's song again:

"Thanks, friend, for the warning words you say,
Yet across yon sea will I seek my way,
Though the winds may howl and the breakers roar,
Though I never again should come back to the shore;
For this is the chief of pleasures to me,
To drive my keel through an unknown sea;
To feel the waves dash over my prow,
As I try how fast and how far I can go."

This was more than the priest could bear; he rushed past Signe, tearing the book out of her hand as he did so, and dashed to the door; nor did his daughter try to stop him this time. He came in upon Petra at full speed, threw the book on the piano before her, turned round, paced hurriedly

round the room, and came back again to her; she had risen, and was holding the book clasped to her breast as she looked around on all sides in wild amazement. He stopped in front of her, meaning to tell her all he thought; but his wrath at having been used as a tool for more than two years by this wily girl, and especially at the thought of his warm-hearted, self-sacrificing daughter having been tricked so, was so mighty in his heart, that he could not at first find words, and when he did, he himself felt that they were too bitter. Once more he paced wildly round the room, stood before her again with a face red with passion, and then, without a single word, turned his back on her and went into his study. When he got there he found Signe gone.

All that day, each of them remained in her own room. The priest had his midday meal by himself, as neither of the girls came in. Petra was in the housekeeper's room which had been allotted to her, after the fire in her own: everywhere and in vain she had sought for Signe, to explain; but Signe must surely be away from the parsonage.

Petra felt that she was on the verge of a decisive

step. Her life's most secret thoughts had been torn from her heart, and now an influence would be brought to bear upon her which she could not endure. She herself best knew that, if she were to give up her purpose, she would ever drift before the winds of chance. As it was, she could be light-hearted with the light-hearted, trustful with those that trusted her, and in all things steadfast and secure; but this was all in the strength of her secret purpose; her purpose to one day reach the mark to which all her powers were growing and were prompting her. Should she make a confidant of any one after her first futile attempt at Bergen? No, that she could not do—not even if Oedegaard had been there. She must cherish her resolve in secret, until her powers were so far developed that she could endure people's doubts in the matter.

But now all was suddenly changed. The priest's fiery face was ever present to her frightened conscience—she must find some means of escape! She kept hunting for Signe with more and more feverish excitement; but it was already afternoon, and no Signe was to be found. Now, the longer a person for whom we are looking keeps out of our

way, the more stress we lay on the cause of our separation, and thus it came about that Petra at last began to consider that she had been guilty of terrible treachery to Signe in using her friendship to help her on to what Signe herself considered a very sinful thing. The all-knowing God could be her witness that that view of the matter had never before occurred to her, but now indeed she felt that she was a great sinner.

Just as once before in her own home, so now she felt herself overwhelmed by a thing of which the moment before she had not had a shadow of anxiety! That such a terrible thing could come upon her again, and that she had not even now got a step further on the right road, increased her former feeling of doubtful fear to absolute terror, and she saw before her nothing but a future of unhappiness. But in proportion as her own feeling of sinfulness grew, so did the image of Signe's own pure-hearted and loving self-sacrifice. Truly Signe had heaped coals of fire upon her: let her then cast herself at Signe's feet, cry to her and pray to her, and never leave off clinging to her and beseeching her, till she had given her just one loving, friendly look.

It had grown dark; Signe must be home again now, wherever she had been. Petra ran down the passage and into the wing of the building where Signe's room was; the door was locked—a sign that she was inside. Petra's heart beat fast as she took hold of the handle again, and cried in a voice of entreaty:

"Signe, let me come and talk to you! Signe, I can't bear this any longer!"

Not a sound from the room. Petra bent down, listened, and knocked again:

"Signe, oh Signe! you don't know how miserable I am!"

No answer. Petra listened long, but no sound came from within. If we get no reply at such times, we are apt to grow doubtful whether there is any one to answer, even if we know that there must be; and if it is dark, we grow anxious and frightened as well.

"Signe, Signe! If you are there, have pity on me—answer me! Signe!"

Still all was silence, and Petra began to shiver and tremble. The kitchen door opened, letting out a broad, clear stream of light, and from the yard came the sound of light-hearted, merry foot-

steps. This put a thought into Petra's head: she would herself go into the yard, climb up on the ledge that ran along the stone wall which formed the lower part of the side of the wing of the building, go all round the house on this ledge till she got to the other side where it was very high, and thus look into Signe's room!

It was a bright starry night, and the mountain and the houses stood out in sharp clear outlines. The snow shone white, and the dark footpaths here and there served only to set off its radiant purity; from the road came the sound of sleigh-bells. The light and the sounds inspirited her, and she sprang up on to the ledge. She tried to hold tight to the projecting timber-work above, but she overbalanced herself, and fell down again. She took an empty barrel and rolled it up to the wall, got on to it, and from it to the ledge. Then she worked along hands and feet together, moving them about six inches at a time. It needed a strong hand with strong fingers to hold on tight, and she could not get a proper grasp of the woodwork, because it was barely an inch broad. She was afraid some one might see her; for, if so, he would of course put it down as having something

to do with the affair of the rope-ladder. If only she could get away from the side facing the yard, and reach the cross-wall! But when at last she managed to do so, there was a new peril to be faced: there was nothing in front of the windows, and she had to bend down as she passed each one, always in fear of falling off. The height of the wall was considerable, and all along it below there ran a hedge of gooseberry bushes, upon which she would certainly fall if she slipped; but she went on undaunted.

Her fingers were throbbing, her limbs trembling, she shivered all over her body, but still she went on. Only a few steps more now, and she would be at Signe's window. There was no light burning in the room, and the blind was not down; the moon shone in such a way that Petra would be able to see every corner. This gave her new courage. She was now close to the window-sill, and seizing it with her whole hand, she paused to rest; for now that she had reached her goal, her heart began to beat so violently that she could scarcely breathe. But the longer she waited the worse it grew, so she hastened on, and stood suddenly in front of the window-pane.

There was a piercing cry from within. Signe, who had been sitting in a corner of the sofa, sprang into the middle of the room, and, with both hands and wild gestures of abhorrence striving to keep off the terrible apparition at her window, rushed off in affright.

Petra realized in a moment what her figure against the panes in the clear light of the moon—her heedless, horrid boldness, her excited face all ablaze with the moon's rays—must have brought about. She saw that her luckless idea alone was quite enough to have frightened any one, and that henceforth the sight of her would probably be always a terror to Signe. Consciousness left her, and, with a thrilling shriek, she fell down.

At Signe's cry of terror all the people in the house had come running out, but they had found nothing. The second shriek set everybody about the place searching and talking loudly, but still without result. It was by pure chance that the priest happened to look out of Signe's window, and in the moonshine saw Petra lying wedged in among the bushes. A great fear fell upon them all, and it was not easy for them to get her free and lift her up. She was taken up to Signe's room

—because the housekeeper's was cold—undressed, and put to bed; then some set about bathing her hands and neck, which were badly torn by the brambles, while others made the room comfortable, cheerful, and warm. When she had quite come to, and looked around her, she begged them to leave her alone.

The quiet cheerfulness of the room, the delicate whiteness of the windows, the toilet table, the bed, and the chairs, brought back Signe vividly to her mind. She thought of her pure, loving heart; her gentle voice, through which spoke her stainless soul; her fine feeling for the thoughts of others; her soft, sweet kindliness. From all this she had barred herself out, she felt: soon she would have to leave this room; soon, too, the parsonage itself. And where was she to go then?

One is not taken up from the highways three times in one's life, and even if that could be so, she would have no more of it; it could only end, it seemed to her, in the same way. No one would ever be able to have faith in her: whatever the reason for it might be, she felt, at any rate, it was so. She had not got one step further, and she never would; for unless people trusted her she

could not. Ah! how she prayed, how she wept! In the anguish of her soul she writhed and flung herself about, until at last she fell asleep from pure weariness.

As she slept everything about her seemed to grow white and high. Never had she seen anything so towering high as this, nor such a radiant whiteness—as if a million stars were shining down on her.

CHAPTER X

ENLIGHTENMENT

WHEN she awoke, she was still up in the clouds; the thoughts that came streaming in on her with the daylight strove to come up there too, but were straightway taken captive and borne away by something with which the whole air was filled—the sound of the bells for the Sabbath service. She sprang out of bed and put on her clothes, ate a little food in the pantry, wrapped herself up warmly and hurried away—never in her life before had she so thirsted for the Word of God as now she did! By the time she reached the church, service had just begun and the door was closed: it was a cold day, and her fingers glowed as she took hold of the door-handle and turned it. The priest was standing right in front of the altar, so she stood waiting by the door till he had finished and the acolyte was about to remove the chasuble; then she made her way into what was known as the

"Bishop's pew," a pew standing in the choir with curtains in front of it. The proper pew for the priest's family was up in the gallery; but if any one had reason for wishing to sit unseen and alone, the Bishop's pew was resorted to. When Petra reached it and crept in, she saw Signe already seated there in its further corner. She took one step out again, but just at that moment the priest turned to go past her from the altar to the vestry; she quickly retreated into the pew again, and sat down as far from Signe as she possibly could, for Signe had let her veil down, and that grieved Petra sorely. She looked out at the congregation as they sat wedged in in the high wooden pews, the men on the right, and on the left the women; their breath formed a waving cloud above them; on the windows the ice was an inch thick. The clumsy images of carved wood, the heavy, dragging singing, the thickly wrapped-up folks sitting there, all seemed to match one another and to be hard and distant from her. The impression that the look of the country round Bergen had made on her, the afternoon that she left it, came back to her mind; once more she was nothing but a fear-stricken wayfarer.

The priest was now standing in the pulpit, and in *his* eyes, too, there was a look of sternness. "Lead us not into temptation!" he prayed, "for we know that any of the talents Thou hast given us may lead us astray." He prayed that God would be merciful and not try us above our strength; and that we might never forget to pray for His grace; for only by humbling our faculties at His feet could they be made to help us toward salvation. In his sermon he enlarged on the same subject, dwelling on the double task our talents brought with them: first, that of doing our duty each in that state of life in which our faculties and circumstances have placed us; secondly, that of developing in us and in those intrusted to our care the ideal of the Christian man. We must be very careful, he went on, in making choice of our life's work; for alas! there are certain callings which, of themselves, are sinful; others there are which may become so to us, either because they are not fitting for us, or are only too well fitted to minister to our sinful desires. And moreover, just as certain as it was that each must try and make choice according to his powers, so certain was it that a choice which of itself was neither unrighteous nor evil

might nevertheless lead us into temptation if we allowed it to swallow up all our time and all our thoughts. Our duties as Christians, he said, must no more be neglected than our duties as parents toward our children. We must be able so to guard our thoughts that the Holy Spirit might ever find room to perform its work within our hearts; we must be able to implant and protect the good seed of the love of Christ in our children. There could be no work, no excuse, which could release us from that duty, whatever our circumstances might be.

And now he went deeper into the matter—he explored the life-work of those who sat before him, their household, their place in life, and their thoughts. From other careers and mightier callings he drew forth such illustrations as might cast light on their own. The priest was a new man to those who only knew him in daily life, from the moment he warmed up to his subject in the pulpit. Even his outward appearance was altered: his stern, compressed face seemed to grow open and radiant with the thoughts that shone through it; his eyes dilated and looked straight and steadfastly before him, as if announcing great tidings;

his rough, shaggy hair looked like the mane of a lion; his voice rolled forth in thunderous bursts, or cut sharp and keen with short, quick phrases, at times falling to a quiet whisper, and then rising again with greater power. He was indeed quite unable to speak well except in a large place and with his thoughts fixed on the Eternal; for there was no music in his voice, save when he spoke with all his strength; nor was his face expressive, or his thoughts incisive and clear, save when all ablaze with deep feeling. Not that he came to his subject for the first time when in the pulpit; for sorrow and contemplation alike had filled his soul with great store, and he was, in addition, a close and diligent student. But he was not always fit for the daily affairs of life and able to coin his thoughts into conventional talk. He needed to do all the talking, or at least to pace up and down the floor while it was going on. To begin a discussion with him was much like attacking a weaponless man, but all the same it was not without its perils; for the violence with which he expressed his convictions was such as to leave little opportunity for argument. Was he pressed to give his reasons, one of two things was the result: either he overwhelmed

his antagonist with such vehemence of language that there was always danger of a quarrel, or else he suddenly became dumb, fearing his own passionate nature. No one could be more easily put to silence than this strong, eloquent man.

Petra had begun to tremble as soon as the priest began his prayer, for she knew his reason for selecting those words. The longer he went on, the nearer she felt him coming to her own case. She shrank up into her corner, and she saw that Signe was doing the same. But with pitiless strength he hewed his way through—the lion was out after his prey. She felt herself pursued everywhere, penned in and at his mercy; but what was seized with so mighty a grasp was held gently in the hand of mercy. It was as if, without one word of condemnation, she were laid on the bosom of the All-loving One. In that haven she wept and prayed; and when she heard Signe, too, weeping and praying, she loved her for it!

The priest came down from the teacher's seat and went past them into the vestry, his face glowing with radiant splendor that came from communion with the Most High. His eyes fell searchingly and frankly on Petra; and as she looked up

at him with trustful, candid eyes, a gleam of gentle kindness lighted up his face: he gave a quick glance at his daughter in her corner and passed on.

Presently Signe rose, but her veil was down, and Petra did not dare to join her, so she waited a little before going; but at dinner that day all three sat together again. The priest talked a little, but Signe was reserved and silent. He evidently wished to say something about what had taken place; but as soon as he made the slightest approach to it, Signe turned the conversation so delicately, yet with such modest shyness, that the priest could not help being reminded of her mother. This made him first silent and then sad, for so very little was needed to do that.

Now nothing is more dreary than an attempt at reconciliation that has turned out a failure. They rose from the table without being able even to look at one another or exchange the salutations customary after a meal. In the sitting-room, the situation at last became so oppressive that each of them would have been glad to get away from it, but none of them liked to be the first to go; Petra, for her part, feeling that if she went now, it must even be

never to return. She could not look upon Signe again, if she were not to be allowed to love her; she could not bear seeing the priest made sorrowful because of her. But if she must go, she must go, she felt, without bidding them farewell; for how *could* she say farewell to them? The mere thought of it moved her so that she had scarcely strength enough to control her emotion.

Every minute that prolongs such a strained situation, when each is waiting for the other to do something, makes it more and more unbearable. One dares not move, for fear it should be noticed; every breath is heard, nor can one remain quite still without its being perceived, and seeming like obstinate hard-heartedness. Each is in anxious suspense because no word is spoken, and in trembling fear lest any one should speak.

Each felt that this moment could never come back to them again. The walls we build up between one another rise ever higher and higher; our own offense, the offense of others, seems to grow greater with every breath we draw. At one moment we are deep in despair, in indignation the next. Such treatment of us, we feel, is merciless and hard-hearted, and we will never put up

with it nor forgive it. Petra could stand it no longer; she felt she must either cry out or run away.

Suddenly there came the sound of sleigh-bells from the road, and then a man in wolfskin clothing, with a post-boy behind him, was seen dashing by the garden and into the yard. Each drew a long breath in anxious expectation of deliverance! They heard the traveler in the passage, they heard him taking off his traveling-boots, and talking to the maid as she helped him. The priest rose from his place to go and greet him, but turned back, not wishing to leave the two girls alone. Again they heard the stranger talking in the hall, and this time the sound of his voice was nearer, and made them all three look up. Petra rose and fixed her eyes on the door—there was a knock.

"Come in," said the priest, in an excited voice; and a man with a fresh, clear face, and glasses over his eyes, stood on the threshold.

Petra uttered a cry and sank back into her chair. It was Oedegaard.

He did not come quite as a surprise to the priest and Signe, for they had expected him at the parsonage for Christmas, although they had told Petra

nothing about it. But all felt that it was the hand of Providence that had brought him there just at that moment.

Before Petra fully realized what had happened, he was standing by her with her hand in his. He continued to hold it, but neither he nor she spoke —indeed, she could not even rise from her seat —but two tears trickled down her cheeks as she sat there looking at him. He was very pale, but quite calm and tender. He let go her hand, walked across the floor, and turned to Signe, who had hidden herself in the furthest window among her mother's flowers.

Petra longed to be alone, and crept away; Signe went diligently about her household work, and the priest took Oedegaard into his study and refreshed him with a glass of wine, which he much needed after his journey. As they sat there, he told him in a few words all that the last few days had brought with them. Oedegaard listened and said nothing, but grew very thoughtful. They were interrupted, however, in a somewhat strange way.

Two women and three men walked past the windows in single file, and the priest no sooner caught

sight of them than he sprang up, exclaiming: "Here they come again. Now we shall need all our patience."

In filed the women, slowly and silently followed by the men. They ranged themselves along the wall beneath the book-shelves and opposite the sofa on which Oedegaard was sitting. The priest set chairs before them and got others from the sitting-room. All then sat down, with the exception of a young man, dressed as if he came from the town; he refused a chair, and remained standing by the door-post, both hands in his pockets, and a certain air of defiance in his looks.

After a long silence, during which the priest filled his pipe, and Oedegaard—who did not smoke—closely scanned the party, a pale, fair-skinned woman, who seemed to be about forty years old, began to speak. Her forehead was rather narrow; her eyes large but timorous, and seemed not to know where to look.

"That was a fine sermon you preached to-day, parson," she said, at length; "it just fitted in with what we were all thinking about; for we have lately been constantly talking about temptations up at Oeygars."

She sighed, and a man with a short crabbed jaw and chin, and a large broad forehead, sighed as well, and said:

"Lord, turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken Thou me in Thy way."

Then Else, the first speaker, gave another sigh, saying:

"Wherewithal shall the young cleanse their ways? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word."

This sounded strange coming from her, for she was no longer young.

And now a man of middle age, who sat rocking to and fro on his chair, his head on one side, and his eyes half shut, murmured, as if in a dream:

"Of trial and temptation sore
Each one must have his share,
That has his part in Jesu's death,
And His dear name would bear."

The priest knew them too well not to be aware that all this was merely by way of prologue; so he waited as if nothing had been said, and silence,

broken only by deep sighs, fell upon them again.

A little woman, whose stooping figure made her look even smaller than she was, and who was wrapped up in such a vast number of shawls that she looked a mere bundle of them—her face was quite hidden—presently began to rock and sway about, and gave vent to a couple of short grunts. Straightway the fair-haired woman was set off again:

"There is an end to all sorts of playing and dancing up at Oeygars now," she said; "but —but—" and she paused, whereupon Lars, the man with the short jaw and broad brow, went on:

"—but there is *one* man, Hans Fiddler, who *will* not leave off—" and, as Lars paused to consider how to get out the rest of what he wanted to say, the young man took it up:

"—for he knows that the parson himself has an instrument, and that the people at the parsonage both sing and dance to it—"

"—and it surely can't be a greater sin for him than it is for the parson," said Lars.

"The fact is," said Else, cautiously, trying to get

to the point, "the parson's music acts as a temptation to him."

And the young man added, vehemently:

"It is an offense unto the young, and it is written, 'Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.' "

It was now Lars's turn to take up the running:

"Therefore we desire that you will send away your instrument or cast it into the fire, so that it be no longer for an offense—"

"—to the children of thy care," added the young man.

The priest drew in his smoke and puffed it out again, and at last, with an evident effort to control himself, spoke:

"To me the music is not a temptation, but rather recreation and relief. Now you know that the things which refresh and relieve our souls bring us nearer to receiving the truth and understanding it; therefore, I believe that such things as my music are of a certainty helpful to me."

"And I know," said the young man, "that there

are priests who, as Saint Paul has enjoined, would willingly forsake, at the request of their congregations whatsoever might be 'a stumbling block or an occasion to fall.' "

"It may be," answered the priest, "that I, too, once interpreted his words as you do, but now I no longer do so. That one ought to give up bad habits or self-indulgence is true, but no one is required to make himself narrow and foolish with the narrow and foolish. I should be acting wrongly not only toward myself, but also to those to whom I have to set an example; for I should be setting them a foolish example—an example contrary to my own convictions."

Seldom was the priest able to give such a long explanation as this, when he was not in the pulpit; and now he added:

"I will neither give up my instrument nor burn it, and I shall often listen to its music, I hope, for I have often need to do so; and I would that you, too, in all innocence, might now and again refresh your souls with song and music and dancing; for such things I hold well for you and fitting."

The young man gave a grunt of contemptuous

disgust, turned his head aside, and spat on the floor.

The blood rushed up to the priest's face; deep silence reigned over all, until the man who sat swaying from side to side broke forth in a high voice:

"O Lord, my God, on every side
I see the signs of pain and woe;
Each one his cross must patient bear;
Mighty or weakling, high or low,
We all must suffer and endure:
But flesh is feeble, and we know
That Thou—"

Here Lars burst in in sarcastic tones:

"You say then that dancing and music are good, do you? Come, then, it's good for us, is it, to stir up Satan in our senses? So that's what our parson says, does he? He tells us that idle and sensual pleasures recreate and help us—that things that tempt us are good for us! Well, well, at any rate we know now what he thinks."

But here Oedegaard quickly broke in, for he saw that the priest was being worked up into a furious passion:

"Tell me, my good fellow," he said, "what is there which may *not* become a temptation to us?"

All looked at him from whom these well-weighed words came. The question was in itself so unexpected that neither Lars nor any of the others knew for a moment what answer to make. But as if from the depths of a well, or from far down in a cellar, there came the word:

"Work."

The voice came from the bundle of shawls: it was Randi, who now for the first time took part in the discussion. A smile of triumph broke over Lars's short jaw, the fair woman looked at her with eyes full of faith, and even the young man standing by the door-post forgot for a moment the scornful curve of his lips. Oedegaard at once saw that she was their head, although her own was not to be seen. He therefore turned toward her and said:

"If work is to be without temptation, of what kind must it be, pray?"

She could not answer for a moment, but the young man interposed:

" 'In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread,'

says the curse; wherefore our work must bring us sweat and toil."

"And nothing but sweat and toil, then? Is it to bring us no advantage, for example?"

This silenced the young man, too, for a moment; but now the spirit moved the short-faced man:

"Yes," he said, "as much as you can get out of it."

"Well, then, there may easily be a temptation lurking in one's work—I mean the temptation to get too much out of it."

In these straits, succor came from out of the depths:

"It is the profit then that tempts us, not the work."

"Well, what difference does that make, if the work is carried too far for profit's sake?"

She beat a retreat again, but Lars sallied boldly forth:

"Work carried too far? What do you mean by that?"

"Why, when it makes a man a brute—the mere slave of itself."

"There must needs be slavery," came from him who had insisted on toil and sweat.

"But can work which is done in a slavish spirit lead us to God?"

"Work is the worship of God!" cried Lars.

"Dare you say that of *all* your work?"

Lars was dumb.

"No, you can not! You must be fair, and grant that for profit's sake work may be carried to such a pitch that it becomes the only thing we live for! Wherefore, even in work there is temptation."

"Yes, children, yes, there is temptation in all things—temptation in everything!" said the priest, as if giving judgment; and rising, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, for a sign that the discussion was over. A sigh came from among the shawls, but no one spoke.

"Listen to me!" began Oedegaard again—and the priest filled his pipe afresh—"listen! If work brings forth its fruits, that is to say profit, surely we are allowed to enjoy these fruits, are we not? And if it bring us riches, shall we not enjoy them too?"

These questions seemed to make them all very thoughtful, and they looked at one another musingly.

"Let me answer while you are thinking over it,"

Oedegaard went on. "God must have permitted us to try and turn his curse into a blessing, for with his own hand he guided his patriarchs and his chosen people to the enjoyment of riches."

"The Apostles were enjoined to have nothing," interjected the young man, in a tone as if these words settled the question.

"True enough, for them he wished to place above and beyond all earthly things so that they might set their eyes on God alone; they were called of the Lord!"

"So are we all!"

"Yes, but not in the same way. Are you, for instance, called to be an apostle?"

The young man turned deathly pale, and his eyes grew dark beneath his massive, overhanging brow; there must have been some special reason for his feeling these words so deeply.

"But the rich must work as well as the poor," said Lars, "for work is enjoined on all."

"Most certainly, but their objects and methods are different; each has his own work to do. But tell me this: shall a man do nothing but work?"

"He shall likewise pray!" came from the lips of the fair-haired woman; and she folded her

hands as if she suddenly called to mind that she had long neglected to do so.

"Well, then, whenever a man's not working he is to be praying, is he? Is that possible for any one? What sort of prayer, what sort of work, would such a one's be? Is he never to have any rest, pray?"

"We are to rest," said Else, "when we are too tired to work any longer; for thus we shall escape the temptation of evil thoughts—yes, thus alone can we avoid being tempted!"

And he who had before quoted the hymns started off again:

"Oh, when worn out with toil,
With earthly swink and moil,
Ye rest your weary head,
Ask ye sweet Jesu's care,
For soon shall men prepare
In earth your narrow bed."

"Do be quiet, Erik, and listen to what's being said," urged the priest, as Oedegaard began to sum up.

"You see, then," he said, "the worker brings

forth fruit and needs rest; and it seems to me that the pleasures of social intercourse, singing, music, and the like, are not only the sweet and lawful fruit of labor, but also give the soul strengthening refreshment and support."

These statements caused great excitement in the opposing camp. All looked at Randi, as if now was the time for the main guard to advance. Rocking from side to side, she at length said in a low, deliberate voice:

"There can surely be no real refreshment in worldly songs, music, and dancing; since such things urge the flesh to sinful desires. Surely that can not be a lawful fruit of our labor which wastes it and weakens us."

"Ah! indeed, there is great temptation in such things!" sighed out the fair-haired woman, and Erik started off again into a hymn:

"Crimes and vices growing greater
Every day, we mark with sorrow;
Creeping on our spirits softly,
Sins the guise of virtue borrow;
Once within those holy places
Bold they show their real faces."

"Do be quiet, Erik," said the priest; "you only distract us."

"Ah, yes, no doubt I do," said Erik; and off he started again:

"If ever one with wheedling words
On you should try his art,
To lead thee into sin's smooth ways,
With him have thou no part."

"Come now, Erik, you really must hold your tongue for a bit," cried the priest. "Hymns are well enough, but at the right time and place."

"Yes, yes, parson, that's true enough—always at the right time and place:

"In every place and time
To praise Him be thy care,
Each heart-beat help to chime
Bells calling thee to prayer."

"Come, come, Erik! even prayer would be a temptation at this rate. You must turn Papist and go into a cloister—"

"God forbid!" cried Erik, opening his eyes wide, and then shutting them again as he sang out:

"As mud and dirt by veriest gold
Is the Papist's creed to—"

"Look here now, Erik, if you can't be quiet, you must really go out of the room!—Where was it we left off?"

Oedegaard did not remember; he had been following Erik's proceedings with much amusement. But a peaceful voice was heard from amid the shawls:

"I was saying that that can not really refresh us or be a lawful fruit of toil which, like dancing and—"

"Now I remember; we were saying that there was temptation in—and then Erik came and showed us that there can be temptation even in prayer. Let us see then what we can get out of this. Have you noticed that the happy work better than the dejected? And why is this?"

Lars saw the drift of this question, and made answer:

"It is only faith that makes us really happy."

"Yes, when our faith is not a gloomy one; but have you never seen that a man's religion may make him so gloomy that the world is nothing but a penitentiary to him?"

The fair woman uttered sigh upon sigh with such persistence that it stirred up the bundle of shawls to sway about again; but Lars looked at her severely, and she was mute again. Oedegaard went on:

"Being always at the same thing, whether work, prayer, or sport, makes a man stupid and gloomy. You may dig in the earth till you're no better than a brute, pray till you're a monkish slave, play till you're no better yourself than a mere plaything. But do some of each, and the change from one to the other will brace up your heart and mind, your work will prosper, and your belief be the happier."

"We should try to be cheerful, then, you say?" said the young man with a scornful laugh.

"Yes, for so would you, for your part, be brought into sympathy with the rest of mankind; for not till a man is happy can he see what there is good in other men and love it. But unless you love other men, you can not love God."

As no one was ready to contradict that, Oedegaard tried once more to sum up his remarks:

"Such things as set our minds free, so that the Holy Spirit may do its work in us—for He finds no room to work in those whose minds are fettered down—such things as are helpful to us must of necessity carry a blessing with them; and this is what the things we have been speaking of do."

The priest rose, and once more knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

In the silence which followed—silence unbroken even by a sigh—the bundle of shawls worked about uneasily, and at last there came a gentle voice from it:

"It is written, 'Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God'; but can wordly music, singing, and dancing be to His glory?"

"Directly, no; but may we not say the same of our eating, sleeping, dressing? And yet we are bound to do these things. Therefore the meaning of the text must be that you shall do nothing which is sinful."

"Yes; but are not these things sinful?"

For the first time Oedegaard began to get somewhat impatient.

"We see," he said, "from the Bible that not only singing, but also music and dancing were made use of—"

"Yes, for the glory of God."

"Granted; for the glory of God, then. But the Jews named God in all things, because they were like children, and had not learned to distinguish one thing from another. To a child all strangers are alike 'the man.' To the child's question, 'Where does this come from?' 'Where does that come from?' we give always the same answer: 'From God'; but when men speak to men, we do not name only the prime giver, God, but we mention the intermediaries as well. Thus, for example, a beautiful song may be a work of God and lead us to Him, though His name be never mentioned in it; for many things which do not lead us straight to Him yet draw us toward His throne. Our dancing, so long as it is really healthful, innocent amusement, is, if not a thanksgiving in words, yet all the same a method of thanking Him who gives us our health and loves the child within our hearts."

"Listen to that! listen to that!" said the priest. He knew that he himself had long misunderstood

these things, and had caused others to misunderstand them.

But Lars had long been sitting deep in thought, and now he was ready. The grains of wisdom had been slowly dropping from the high, broad forehead to the short, crabbed jaws, and now, crushed and winnowed and ground, the meal came forth:

"Are all kinds of tales, stories, and fables, all sorts of poetry and fiction, such as books are filled with nowadays, allowable? Is it not written, 'Every word that goeth out of thy lips shall be truth?'"

"I'm very glad you reminded me of that. Look here, a man's mind is like the house he lives in. If it's so small that he can scarcely hold his head up or stretch his limbs out in it, he must do his best to enlarge it. Now, poetry makes our thoughts wider and loftier. If all our thoughts of things above our actual needs were false, then our thoughts of things actually needful would soon be false too. They would so fetter you to your earthly dwelling that you would never near the Eternal, which is just the goal you are striving to reach; and it is just those thoughts of things

above us which, by the help of faith, will carry us there."

"But," said Randi thoughtfully, "does not fiction tell about things that have never happened? Is it not, then, all full of lies?""

"No," replied Oedegaard; "there is often more truth in fiction than in the things we think we see."

They all looked at him doubtfully, and the young man observed:

"I never knew before that there was more truth in the fairy tale about Askeladd than in what lies before my eyes." And the rest all giggled a little at this.

"Tell me, then, do you always understand the things you see going on around you?" said Oedegaard.

"No, of course not. I'm not learned enough."

"Ah, the learned are even less able to account for things than you are. Look, for instance, at the things in daily life which cause us grief and pain, and which, as the saying is, we worry ourselves black about. Don't such things ever befall us?"

He made no answer; but from the shawls came an earnest—

"Yes, indeed; often and often."

"But suppose, now, you heard a tale, which was so like your own case, that in listening to it you understood your own? Would you not say that this story, which made your own case clear to you, and gave you that courage and consolation that comes of understanding—would you not say that that tale had more real truth in it than the actual facts of your own life?"

"I once read a tale," said the fair woman, "which so helped me in my great sorrow, that what had before seemed to me so sad, became almost a cause of rejoicing to me."

"Yes, that is quite true," came with a timid cough from among the shawls.

But the young man was by no means satisfied.

"Can the story about Askeladd be of any help to any one?" he asked.

"Well, well; everything has its own use. Humor appeals to most of us very strongly, and that story shows in a comical way that what the world values least may be of the greatest account; that all can be made to help the man who has a stout heart, and that a man can do what he makes up his mind to do. Don't you think many children,

not to say grown-up folks, would do well to bear that in mind?"

"But surely it is superstitious to believe in witches and trolls?"

"Nobody said you should believe in such things. In such tales, the expressions are mere figures of speech."

"But it is forbidden us to use images and figures. Like all other deceits, they belong to the devil."

"Do they? Where do you find that?"

"In the Bible."

"No," said the priest, breaking suddenly in; "there you are mistaken; the Bible itself makes use of figures."

All looked up at him.

"It uses figures on every page, for Eastern peoples are much given to them. We ourselves use figures in our churches and in our speech, on wood, on canvas, and on stone, and we can not form any idea of the Godhead except through pictures or figures. Nor is this all: Jesus uses figures constantly. Did not the Lord God Himself use many forms when He declared Himself unto His prophets? Did He not come to Abraham in

Mamre, and take meat at his table in a traveler's guise? But if the Godhead deigned to put on many forms, and to use figures freely, surely we men may safely do so."

They were forced to assent.

Oedegaard, springing up, tapped the priest gently on the shoulder.

"Thanks!" he whispered. "You have proved most clearly from the Bible that play-acting is allowable!"

The priest was dumb with amazement. The smoke in his mouth curled slowly out of its own accord.

Oedegaard walked across the floor to her of the many shawls, and bent down to try to catch a glimpse of her face, but could not succeed.

"Is there anything more you want to know?" he asked: "you seem to me to have thought a good deal about one thing and another."

"Ah, Lord help me! very often I don't think in the right way."

"When one is first filled with the grace of conversion, one is so taken up with its wonders that all else seems useless and vain beside it. One is

like a lover, who desires nothing save his loved one."

"Ah, but look at the first Christians; surely they ought to be our patterns."

"No; their difficult life among the heathen is no longer ours; our duties are different; it is for us to bring our Christianity into the life of to-day."

"But there are so many things in the Old Testament which speak in a spirit quite the opposite of what you say," said the young man, and this time with no sneer in his voice.

"True; but those things have no longer any force for us—they are 'done away,' as Saint Paul says: 'We are able ministers of the new covenant; not of the letter but of the spirit'; and further: 'Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.' And again says Saint Paul: 'All things are lawful for me, but,' he adds, 'all things are not expedient.' Now we are fortunate enough to have before us the life of a man who has shown us what Saint Paul meant, namely, Luther. You will admit of course, that Luther was a pious and enlightened Christian?"

Yes, they were sure of that.

"Luther's creed was a cheerful one, for it was that of the New Testament. He thought that behind a gloomy creed was pretty generally to be found the Devil. As for constant fear of temptation, he thought that those who feared least were least tempted. He made use of all the capacities God had granted him, not forgetting the capacity for enjoyment, and this he did his whole life long. Will you listen to some instances of it? The pious Melancthon was once so hard at work on a defense of the pure Religion that he did not give himself time for his meals. Luther came and snatched the pen out of his hand: 'We serve God not by work alone,' he said, 'but also by rest and recreation; for this has God given us the Third Commandment and instituted the Sabbath.' Moreover, Luther did not think it amiss to use figures and images when he spoke, sometimes of a sportive, at others of an earnest kind, and he was full of fine and often merry thoughts. Further, he translated into his mother-tongue many good old fairy-tales, saying in the preface to his translation that, except the Bible, he knew nothing that contained finer moral teaching than they do. As you probably know, he played on the zither, and was wont to join with

friends and children in singing—not only hymns, but also merry old songs. He liked social gatherings, he played chess, and had young people to his house to dance; all he required was that they should behave modestly and reputably. A certain simple-minded old disciple of his, one Johann Mathesius, has written all this down about him, and used to preach on it to his flock from the pulpit; he prayed it might serve them for an example; let us pray so too!"

"Dear friends," said the priest, rising, "this is enough for to-day."

The others all rose, and he went on:

"Much has been said that may enlighten us; may God help the good seed to bring forth! Dear friends, you live in lonely and desolate places, where the corn is more often cut short by the frost than by the sickle; on barren spots far upon the mountains, which were more fitly given over to imps and elves and nibbling goats. The spirit grows up there short and gloomy like the plants around. Superstition hangs over life there like the crags beneath which it is engendered, overshadowing men and severing them from one another. The Lord unite you! the Lord give you

light! I thank you for coming here to-day, my friends. For me, as well as for you, it has been a day of great enlightenment."

He shook each of them by the hand, and even the young man gave his hand a friendly pressure, though he did not look up.

"You are going back over the mountain," said the priest as they were about to set out; "when will you reach your homes again?"

"Oh, some time to-night," answered Lars. "The snow has been falling very thickly, and where the wind has blown it away, the road is covered with solid ice."

"Indeed, friends, you deserve all praise for coming to church under such circumstances. I hope you will all get home in safety."

Erik quietly answered:

"Be God my guide, then what to me
Is open foe or secret snare?
Safe ever shall my journeyings be,
In loving Jesu's tender care."

"Ah! that's true, Erik," said the priest; "this time you've hit the right nail on the head."

"But wait a moment," said Oedegaard, as they were on the point of departing. "It's not strange that you don't recognize me, but I think there must still be some kinsfolk of mine up at Oeygars."

All turned and looked at the speaker at these words—not excepting the priest, who, it is true, had been told of Oedegaard's connection with the place before, but had forgotten it.

"My name is Hans Oedegaard; I am the son of the priest Knud Hansen Oedegaard, who once wandered out from among you, his wallet on his back."

"Goodness gracious!" came from among the shawls; "he was my brother!"

All stood still in silence, no one knowing what to say; at length Oedegaard asked:

"Was it not you, then, whom we stayed with, when I was a little fellow, and my father took me up there with him?"

"Yes, you stopped with me."

"And with me too for a little time," said Lars; "your father is my first cousin."

"So you are that little Hans! Ah! how the time flies!" said Randi sadly.

"And how is Else?" asked Oedegaard.

"That is Else," said Randi, pointing to the fair woman.

"Are you Else?" he cried. "I remember you were in trouble about your love affairs at that time; did you have your way and marry the fiddler?"

There was no answer, but in spite of the deepening twilight he could see Else growing redder and redder, while the men's eyes wandered round the room or sought the floor—save the young man's who looked piercingly and directly at her.

Oedegaard felt that he had asked an awkward question, but the priest came to his rescue:

"No, Hans Fiddler is unmarried; Else married Lars's son, but she is free to marry again now; she is a widow."

Else blushed still more violently, and the young man looked at her and smiled scornfully.

"Well," said Randi, "you have traveled about a lot, I suppose? I can see you have become a very learned man."

"Till now I have done nothing but travel and study; but now I mean to settle down and get to work."

"Ah, that's how things are in this world! Some

of us journey forth and draw nigh to light and wisdom, while others have to stay at home."

"And the soil of our fathers' land is often hard to till," added Lars; "but when we raise up from it a man who might help us, he straightway leaves us."

"Each has his own bent," said the priest. "Each must obey his own call."

"And the Lord will direct the whole work, be sure!" added Oedegaard. "If God will, my father's work shall yet return to you."

"Ah, yes, that we believe," said Randi with a touch of sadness; "but it's dreary waiting, and it's so long one has to do it."

They went their way, and the priest at one window and Oedegaard at the other watched them as they filed up over the mountain side, the young man bringing up the rear. Of him, the priest told Oedegaard that he was from the town, where he had been engaged in one occupation after another, but had always managed to quarrel with somebody.

He was always fancying that he was born for some great work, and now had got the notion that

he was destined to be an apostle, but much to everybody's surprise he had stopped on at Oeygars, perhaps, as some said, from love of Else; his was a fiery, passionate nature, that had already met with many disillusionments of which there were yet more in store for him.

They could now see the travelers again on the mountain side as they rose above the roof of the cattle-shed.

Slowly they worked their way, ever onward and upward, sometimes hidden by the trees, sometimes plain in their sight. The thick snow hid the pathways, but the trees showed them their way, and the snow-peaks marked their goal.

But to the watchers in the windows came the sound of keys swept in sweet joyous cadence, and then the words:

"Oh, to what should I sing
If not to the Spring,
Though not yet herself be here?
To the haunts will I fly
Where she hiding doth lie,
And lure forth the Sun's bright cheer;

The Fisher Maiden

From the Earth's brown face
Old Winter I'll chase,
  And set ev'ry brook rippling free;
And the warm, sweet hours,
Shall be fragrant with flowers,
  While the birds sing out in their glee;
And the groves shall ring
With the praises we'll sing,
  Of the young, the joyous, the radiant
    Spring!"

CHAPTER XI

PETRA'S CONSECRATION

FROM that day the priest began to spend little of his time with the others; partly because he was busy with Christmas affairs, and partly because he was trying hard to satisfy himself as to whether play-acting was or was not allowable to a Christian. The bare sight of Petra was enough to make him fall into a reverie at once.

While the priest was sitting in his study with a sermon or a book of Christian ethics before him, Oedegaard spent his time with the girls, whose natures he was constantly comparing with one another. Petra's was a glowing, sparkling spirit, never quite the same for two moments: he who would know her must give his whole mind to her as to a book. In Signe, on the other hand, was ever the same sweet, constant kindliness; her movements mirrored her being, and were therefore

never of a startling kind. Petra's voice could assume all tones, sweet or bitter, and any degree of loudness or softness. Signe's was peculiarly pleasant to hear, but there was little variety in it, save indeed to her father's ear, for he could distinguish the slightest shades of change in it. Petra was fully taken up by one, and only one, thing at a time; if her mind was attracted by more than one, she then became a mere onlooker without pronounced convictions. But Signe had an eye for everything and everybody, and quietly, and in a way that attracted no attention, gave her services equally to all. When Oedegaard talked with Petra of Signe, he seemed to be listening to the complaint of a hopeless lover; when he talked with Signe of Petra, he could get little from her. The two girls constantly conversed together; but though they talked without constraint, they never touched on anything but indifferent topics.

Oedegaard had feelings of great thankfulness to Signe, for it was to her that he owed what he called his "new manhood." The first letter which he received from Signe in his great sorrow was like a gentle hand upon his brow. As she described to him with delicate care how Petra had

come to them, misunderstood and harshly treated, and as she modestly pointed out to him that what seemed to be "chance" in her coming there must in reality be the will of God, so "that nothing be lost," it sounded to him as a friendly voice sounds to one who wanders in the depths of some forest and knows not which way to turn.

Signe's letters went with him wherever he went, and guided his footsteps. She thought that every line she wrote would help to lead him back to Petra's embrace, but as a fact they had just the opposite effect; for from these letters Petra's artist's nature rose before him. The key to her being, which he himself had ever sought in vain, Signe unwittingly kept in view; and as soon as he recognized this he saw the mistake which he —as well as she—had made, and it restored him to manhood.

He took good care not to let Signe see what he had learned from her letters, for the first word must come from Petra herself, and not from any of those around her, lest she might be urged to go too fast. But from the time when this dawned upon him, Petra stood before him in a new light. Of course, it was clear enough now: these ever-shift-

ing, restless moments of feeling—each one having full sway while it lasted, each contradicting the other—were nothing but indications of the yet developing artistic temperament. His task must be to gather them all into one firm whole, else would all her efforts be but a patchwork and her life itself a mere sham. But above all, he must guard against her beginning too early; silence must be his plan as long as possible—yes, opposition itself if necessary.

His mind thus busy, he was scarcely aware of it before Petra was once more the main object of his life—but not for his own sake now. He gave much of his time to observing the lives of artists in general and actors in particular. He saw much in them to dismay a Christian; he found monstrous abuses; but abuses he found everywhere, even in the church itself. But because some priests were unworthy and base, did that make the calling itself less great or solemn? If the work of enlightenment, which he felt to be going on everywhere around, had taken its roots in life and poetry, should it not also be found on the stage?

By degrees he grew certain that he was right, and it caused him much joy to see from Signe's

letters that Petra's powers were developing so, and that Signe was just the right person to help her. And now he had come to see and thank the guardian angel, who herself knew not what she had been to him.

But he had also come to see Petra, and find out how far she had gone. The word had been uttered, and so he could at any rate talk freely with her of the matter; that was very welcome to them both, for thus they were able to avoid speaking of the past.

And now guests from the town—unbidden as well as bidden—began to pour in upon them. Now things were in such a state that any chance opportunity, turned to good account, might set everything straight; and this chance was afforded them by the guests. A large gathering had been got together in their honor, and it happened that when the gentlemen were assembled in the study, after dinner, the conversation turned on play-acting; for a certain chaplain who was present had caught sight of a book of Christian ethics lying open on the priest's table, and his eye had been caught by that word of peril, "play-acting." Thereupon arose a vehement discussion, and in the midst of it

in came the priest, for he had not been present at dinner, because he had been sent for to visit a sick man; he was very grave, and neither partook of food nor joined in the talk; but he filled his pipe and listened attentively. As soon as Oedegaard saw that the priest was quietly listening, he tried to get his views clearly put before the others, but it was long in vain; for each time Oedegaard endeavored to draw an inference, the chaplain had a way of crying out, "I deny your premises; I don't agree to it," so that Oedegaard had first to prove the facts he made use of to prove other things; in this way their argument went further and further back, so that they had got from play-acting to navigation, and from navigation to agriculture.

It was then decided to discuss the question systematically, and at Oedegaard's suggestion the priest was selected to act as chairman. Besides him, there were present several other priests and a sea-captain, a swarthy little man with a huge paunch and a couple of thin little legs beneath it, that moved as if made of wood. The chaplain was invited to put into words his objections against play-acting.

"The drama," he said, "was opposed by the more righteous of the pagans themselves. Plato and Aristotle were against it, because it was a corrupter of morals. Socrates, it is true, sometimes was present at the acting of plays; but I deny that that justifies any one in concluding that he approved of them, for one is forced to see many things one does not approve of. The early Christians were earnestly warned against play-acting. Just read Tertullian! Since the restoration of the drama in more modern times, earnest Christians have constantly spoken and written against it. I need only mention such names as those of Spener and Francke, a Christian philosopher such as Schwarz; I need but remind you of Schleiermacher."

"Hear, hear!" cried the captain, for he had heard the name of Schleiermacher before.

"The two last admit that dramatic poetry is not unlawful, and Schleiermacher would even allow really good dramas to be performed at private gatherings, but not by professional actors; for he utterly condemns acting as a business; it offers so many temptations to a Christian, that it is his duty to avoid it. And does it not offer temptation to

the spectators as well, pray? To be moved by imaginary woes, and to have our emotions played on by feigned virtues, a thing which we can more easily guard against while reading a book, lures us on to fancy ourselves to be the thing we see; it weakens the will and self-dependence, and fills our minds with desire to hear, see, and be amused. Will any one deny this? Who are the greatest frequenters of the theatre? Idle loafers, who want to be entertained; sensualists, who desire to have their senses tickled; the vain and the frivolous, who wish to make a show of themselves; and sickly idealists, who flee to the stage for shelter from the actual facts of life, which they dare not grapple with. There is sin before the curtain, sin behind the curtain; and I never knew any sincere Christian but said the same."

Said the captain:

"I really am quite afraid to think where I've been. If I've really been in such a den of wolves each time I've been at the play, why, the devil take—"

"Fy! captain," said a little girl, who had come into the study, "fy! you must not swear, for if you do you'll go to hell."

"Right, right my child—I will not."

"Plato," began Oedegaard, "had the same objections against poetry as against acting, and as for Aristotle's opinion, it is doubtful. I will therefore let that pass. The early Christians did well to keep aloof from *Pagan* plays—so I will let that pass too. That in later times, earnest Christians have had doubts as to the lawfulness of acting, even among Christians, I can quite understand; for I too had my doubts at one time. But if any one allows that the poet is at liberty to write a play, then must he also grant that the actor may act it; for what does the poet do but act it, even while he is writing it? He is acting it in his thoughts, with all his senses and all his passions; and you know Christ's own words: "Whosoever *looketh* on a woman to lust after her," etc. But if Schleiermacher tells us that a play may be acted indeed, but only in private and by unpractised persons, then he is saying that the powers we have received from God are not to be fully cultivated; but surely God's meaning is that we shall develop them to the utmost, for that is the purpose for which we have received them. But we are all of us acting every day of our lives; both when in jest or in

earnest we imitate others, or are subject to their influence. In some people, this power of imitation is far greater than in others, and if such people neglected to turn their powers to their proper uses, it would not be long, I am quite sure, before the evidences of their sin would appear of their own accord. For the man who does not follow the calling his powers fit him for becomes irresolute, restless, and unfitted for any other, and therefore falls a far easier prey to temptation than if he had followed his natural bent. Where work and pleasure are one, there is not nearly so much room for temptation. But, you say, the work is in itself too full of temptation. Well, every man feels temptation in a different way, I suppose. For my part, that calling seems to me to offer far the greatest temptation that tricks a man into thinking that he himself is righteous, because he bears a message from the Righteous One; into believing that he himself has faith, because he preaches faith to others; or to put it more clearly: to me the calling of the priesthood offers the greatest of all temptations."

At this many voices uprose.

"I deny it!"

"I quite agree with him!"

"Silence!"

"That's quite true!"

"Silence!"

"I never heard before," said the captain, "that priests were worse than play-actors."

At this some laughed, and a voice cried out:

"No, no; he didn't say they were."

"Now," said the captain, "may the devil—"

"Hush, hush! captain," came from the little girl; "the devil will come for you at once."

"Well, well, child, I won't swear," answered the captain. And Oedegaard went on:

"All the temptation to get our emotions stirred for the moment, and to settle down to the mere pleasures of hearing and imagining, and the temptation of fancying ourselves the models of virtue we see held up to our admiration, without making earnest effort to become like them—all these temptations, I say, are undoubtedly to be met with in the Church too."

Loud clamor broke out afresh at this, and attracted the ladies to come and see what these repeated outbursts of noise might mean. Through the open door, Oedegaard saw Petra standing

among them. There was a deeper earnestness in his tone as he went on:

"Of course there are actors who are easily stirred when on the stage; who run thence to church, and are equally easily stirred there, and for all that are no better than before. And of course there are actors who are mere windbags, and who in any other calling would be absolutely useless, but who in their own are of some service as windbags. But, on the whole, I believe that actors, like sailors, are so often placed in difficult situations—for the moment before coming on to the stage must often be extremely terrible to them—and are so often called to be the means—under the grace of God—of saving others, and are so often set face to face with the sublime and the unexpected, that there springs up in their hearts a sense of awe and of yearning, and a deep feeling of their own unworthiness; and it was, we know, among contrite women and among publicans that Christ chiefly tarried. I give the actor no special license; indeed, the greater the work he is called upon to do in the land—and how great his work is may be judged from the smallness of the number of really great actors—the deeper is his guilt, if he stoops to turn

his talents to the service of hatred or envy, or lets them be degraded at the call of loose frivolity. But just as there are no actors who have not learnt, by repeated disappointments, how worthless is applause and flattery, even while they affect to believe in it, so do we see their errors and deficiencies; but we don't quite understand their own position, and everything turns on that."

At this, several began to talk all at once; but from the next room came floating in the words of the old ballad:

"Methought that the bygone days had returned,"

and they all streamed in to listen to Signe's singing, for no one could sing the Scandinavian folk-songs like Signe. One ballad followed another, and then when all were inspirited and exalted by the sound of their native songs—surely the fairest outpouring of a great people's soul, and the finest example of the ballad form the world has ever seen—Oedegaard rose and asked Signe to recite something to them. She had evidently been expecting it, for she came forward at once, though she blushed deeply, and her limbs trembled so that

she had to lean on the back of a chair; then, a sudden death-like pallor overspreading her face, she began:

"His father and mother were weak and old,
He was their joy and their hope and their stay;
Yet spite of their love and his home and his gold
Ever he yearned to be up and away.
'O wherefore,' they cried, 'seek'st thou peril and strife,
When here thou hast all that is pleasant in life?'

"Yet his heart was aflame when, like hosts to the fight,
The clouds swept grandly by;
His heart was aflame when the sun's bright light
Seemed a Viking's pomp in the sky.
And he recked not of home, and he recked not of gold,
As he gazed and he dreamt of the glories of old.

"He rose, and his way he took to the shore,
Where the surf beat heavy, the wind blew free:
He must hear the breakers' thunderous roar;
He must watch the strife 'twixt rocks and sea.
It was a day in the wakening spring,
When loud o'er the land doth the storm-voice ring:

'Now rouse thee, thou earth, from thine ice-bound sleep.'
He felt the hot blood in his body leap.

"For a Viking's ship in the dim creek lay,
Holding the storm-king's wrath at bay.
Down was the anchor and furled the sail,
Yet the bark seemed but ill-content to rest;
The mast creaked, the timbers sang in the gale,
As the ship beat the surf with its swelling breast.

"Full fain were the Viking's men for a while
Their labors with revel and rest to beguile.
Lo! sudden a voice upon them broke
From the cliffs above, and, with wild words, spoke:
'Are you *all* afraid of a sea so high?
Come, give *me* the rudder—no peril fear I!'

"Hearing, a few looked up in surprise,
Most of them not even turned their eyes;
None of them ceased to drink or to eat.
Crash! a crag hurled—and two men crushed at their feet.

"Up started all from the deck where they lay,
Naught now of eating or drinking cared they;

Each seizing his weapon, his arrow sped
At the youth who stood dauntless and bare o'er-head.
'Ho, captain! wilt *give* me,' he laughingly cries,
'Thy vessel, or say wilt thou fight for the prize?'

"No answer came from the Viking's tongue,
But full at the mocker a spear he flung;
It missed the rash stripling, who quietly said:
'Me await they not yet in the halls of the dead
But for thee—thou hast plowed every wave of the sea,
Thy labor is ended—they're waiting for thee.
Give unto me, then, all thy prowess has won,
For *thy* time is over—and *mine,* begun.'

"Loud the Viking laughed. 'Now if,' cried he,
'Thou long'st, as thou say'st, so sore,
Come down, and my warrior shalt thou be!'
Rang the answer swift from the shore:
'I must lead, not follow; the power must be mine,
Nor let e'er the young spirit the old confine.'

"No answer came to his words of pride;
Down he leaped, and he loudly cried:

'Ye warriors, shall we in battle show
Which one the War God loves for his own?
Reverence and honor to him will ye owe,
And let shame be the due of the beaten alone?'

"At this the Viking, with wrath ablaze,
Plunged into the sea and swam to the strand;
The youth, with a shout of delight and praise,
Sprang in, and aided his rival to land.

"The Viking marked his fearless eye,
His noble look and bearing high:
'Arms'—to his crew—'fling arms,' I say;
'And thou, if me thou chanc'st to slay,
At least shalt own to thee I brought
The sword by which my death was wrought.'

"They fought upon the rock-bound shore;
The eager war-birds scent their prize
'Mid clash of steel and ocean's roar;
Lo! now the Viking fallen lies!

"One wild shriek thrilled the mountain through,
A shriek of mingled rage and grief;
And, struggling through the surf, the crew
Stood vengeful round their dying chief.

"Then gently moved the Viking's hand,
For the last time he gave command:
'A man must fall, when fall he must;
The mightiest war-song needs must end.
Make *him* thy leader—'tis but just,
For he has conquered! See, they send
To light me now to Odin's board.'
So speaking, died the pirate lord.

"The victor tarried little while;
Quick, rising on a stone, spake he:
'Build of these crags a mighty pile,
That all yon hero's might may see;
And then e'er dusk again away,
Nor let the dead the living stay.'

"They piled the cairn and they raised the sail
And the ship's breast scattered the sea-foam pale,
As a wild, long dirge rang over the wave
For the leader loved that was gone,
And a welcoming shout for the leader brave
Who stood at the helm alone.

"The prow he turned to his home hard-by,
Where the folk stood gathering thick on the strand,

Much marveling that, 'mid waves so high,
A ship dare venture so near the land.
And red in the rays of the evening sun
Lay the bark, and the cairn of the mighty one.

"Straight for the shore did the stripling steer;
'She must surely founder,' cried all in fear;
Quick round went the ship 'mid the seething spray,
'Now, father,' laughed he, 'may I up and away?' "

Her voice had trembled, but she had spoken in a simple, dignified, and unaffected way. Her hearers stood gazing, as if a stream of light glowing with all the colors of the rainbow had welled up from the ground at their feet and flashed high up into the heavens above. No one spoke, no one stirred; till at last the captain could contain himself no longer, and, springing up, with heaving chest, he cried:

"I don't know how *you* all feel; but when *I* am carried away like this, the devil take me if—"

"Captain, you're swearing again!" said the little girl, threatening him with her finger. "In a minute the devil *will* come and carry you off."

"Well, my dear, let him come, then. I don't

care. But, the devil take me or no, I must have a song of our fatherland."

Without further request, Signe went to the piano, and presently the voices of the whole glad company were joined in patriotic song:

"In my land will I dwell,
And my land will I till;
Hers my prayer, and my arm, and my children shall be;
Her soil I'll defend,
And her wants I will tend,
From her uttermost hills to the sand of the sea.

"Hers is sunshine enough,
Hers are seed-fields enough,
If we all give our strength to our dear native land.
So sweet our Norse song,
And our might is so strong,
That her fame must rise high if together we stand.

"In the days that are dead
O'er the swan-path we sped,
And o'er many a country our stern yoke we threw;
Yet our banner to-day
Shall hold mightier sway,
And shine with a splendor the past never knew.

"From our three-cloven North
Shall great glory come forth
When but *one* mighty people are all of Norse blood.
Then lend all thy strength,
That the streamlets at length
May unite in one broad, ever-widening flood.

"O dearest on earth
Is this land of our birth,
As it was, as it is, and as yet it shall prove!
For the love that springs forth
For our home in the North
Makes the Northland wax great with the fruits of our love."

When Signe rose from the piano, she put her arm round Petra and drew her into the study, where no one else was.

"Petra," she said, "shall we be friends again?"

"Oh, Signe, are you really going to forgive me at last?"

"There is nothing I couldn't forgive now. Petra, do you not love Oedegaard?"

"Signe!"

"Oh, Petra, I thought you did from the very first

day you came here; and I thought that he had come here at last to—to— All that I have done or thought for you in these two years and a half was with that in view; and father, I know, thought the same. He has talked of it to Oedegaard, you may be sure."

"But, Signe!"

"Hush!" she whispered, putting her hand on Petra's mouth. And she darted away in answer to a call, for supper was about to be served.

There was wine on the table, for the priest had not been present at dinner. Now he sat very quiet and grave, as if he were alone at table, till just as the others were on the point of rising; then, tapping his glass, he spoke:

"I have a betrothal to announce!" were his words.

All eyes were turned on the two girls, who were sitting side by side, and scarce knew whether to fall from their chairs or not.

"I have a betrothal to announce," said the priest again, as if finding it difficult to get on. "I will confess to you that at first I did not like the thought of it." All the guests here looked at Oedegaard in great astonishment, which grew greater and greater

as he merely sat quietly looking at the priest. "I thought, to tell you the truth, that he was not worthy of her." The guests were now so embarrassed that they could not summon up courage to look up; and as the girls had not dared to, after the opening words, the priest had only one hearer, who looked at him, and that was Oedegaard, whose face was a picture of tranquil enjoyment. "But now," the priest went on, "now that I have got to know him better, I scarcely know whether she is worthy of him, so great is he in my eyes; for the bridegroom is Art, the actor's mighty Art, and his betrothed my foster daughter, my dear Petra. May you be happy together! I tremble to think of it; but those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. God be with you, my daughter!"

In a moment she was across the floor, and her head was on his breast.

As no one sat down again, all, of course, left the table. Petra went at once to Oedegaard, who drew her with him into the recess of the furthest window. He had something to say to her, but she spoke first:

"All this I owe to you!"

"No, Petra! I have been no more than a good brother to you. It was foolish of me ever to have wished to be more; for if what I wanted had happened your whole life would have been spoiled."

"Oedegaard!"

They were holding one another's hands, but their eyes did not meet. A moment later he let go her hand and turned away. She sank into a chair and wept.

Next day Oedegaard had gone.

. . . . . .

Toward spring, Petra received a large envelope with a big official seal on it: it quite frightened her, so she took it to the priest, who opened it and read the letter. It was from the town clerk of her native village, and ran as follows:

"I have the honor of making known to you that Pedro Ohlsen, who departed this life yesterday, has left a will, worded as follows:

" 'All that I possess, which is fully and accurately described in the account book which lies in the blue chest in my room in Gunlaug Aamund's daughter's house on the hill, and of which the said Gunlaug alone has the key, and

knows all that is required, I hereby bequeath (if the aforesaid Gunlaug Aamund's daughter gives her consent, which she can only do by permitting a certain condition attached to this will to be fulfilled, which she alone can fulfil, being the only person who knows how) to Petra, daughter of the aforesaid Gunlaug Aamund's daughter; that is, if she cares to be reminded of a feeble old man whom she has made happy without knowing it—for she could not know it—and whose only joy she has been during his last years; for which reason he has striven to make her some small return that he hopes she will not despise. God be merciful to me, a miserable sinner.

"'Pedro Ohlsen.'

"'In reference to the above, I take the liberty of asking whether you will communicate directly with your mother regarding this affair, or would prefer me to act for you?"

The next post brought her a letter from her mother, written by Hans Oedegaard's father, who was now the only person in whom she dared to confide. It told her that she gave her consent to the fulfilment of the condition, which was to tell Petra what Pedro was to her.

This news and the legacy gave fresh energy to Petra's determination; it seemed as if all things

were shaping themselves to her views, but it was another incitement for her to leave the homestead.

So after all it was to develop Petra's artist spirit that old Pere Ohlsen had earned coppers by fiddling at bridals and dances, and it was for her that he had afterward toiled and drudged, and his son after him, and his son's son. The sum was not a very great one, but it was enough to support her for a while when she went out into the world, and to help her on a bit faster.

And like glad sunshine the thought filled her mind that now her mother could be with her, and every day she could make her mother happier and give her some return for her past sorrows! She wrote her a letter by each post, and could scarcely await her answer. It was a bitter disappointment to her, when it did come; for Gunlaug thanked her, but thought it "better for each to keep by herself." Then the priest promised to write, and when Gunlaug got his letter, she was no longer able to forbear telling the seamen and her other acquaintances that her daughter was about to be a great personage, and wanted her to come and live somewhere with her. At this the thing became a sub-

ject of grave consideration in the village, and was discussed in wharves, ships, and kitchens alike. Gunlaug, who till then had never said a word about her daughter, never talked now of anything but "my daughter Petra," nor did any one ever speak to her now of anything else.

But now the time was at hand for Petra's departure, and Gunlaug had not yet given her a definite answer. This distressed her sorely, though she was somewhat comforted by a solemn promise from both the priest and Signe to come and be with her the first time she appeared on the stage.

The snow was beginning to melt away from the mountains, and the fields were gradually growing green again. Spring, when it comes to the land among the hills, brings with it a life as mighty as the longing for its advent has been. Men's hearts beat quicker, their work grows lighter, and wandering thoughts of the lands that lie beyond the mountains spring up within them. But Petra, spite of her heart's desire, had never loved the place and all around her more than she did now that she was to leave it; it seemed to her as if she had never properly valued it all, or even known its

true value till now. She had only a few more days to spend at the parsonage, so she and Signe went around bidding farewell to everybody and everything—lingering with especial fondness on spots that had become dear to them both. Then a rustic brought them a message that Oedegaard was up at Oeygars, and meant to come down to them. Both girls felt somewhat nervous at this, but they gave up their long walks.

When Oedegaard came, he was bright and cheerful, as they had never seen him before. His business in the parish was to start a high school for the children of the people, and he meant to manage it himself until he found a teacher fit to do so; later on he meant to start various other things for the good of the parish: by this means he hoped, as he put it, to pay off something of his father's obligations to it, and old Oedegaard had promised him to come and live with him, as soon as his house was ready. Both the priest and Signe were well pleased indeed to have them for neighbors; but Petra could not help feeling it a little strange that he should be coming to settle there, just as she was going away.

It was the priest's wish that they all should par-

take of the Last Supper together the day before Petra's departure. Thus a sort of solemn stillness lay over their last days together, and when they talked, their voices were hushed and low. This feeling lent its effect to everything Petra's thoughts touched on, and her eyes were earnest and her talk serious. All the events of her life were gone through again in their order, as she went balancing up her account with herself; for till now she had ever been looking forward, never back. Now it all came back to her from first to last; once more she heard the dear Spanish airs that had enchanted her so, and in her mind she ran over, one by one, the many strange, uncontrolled fancies of her childhood and youth, and the devious paths they had led her into, much as a person might look again at garments that once fitted him, but which he has now outgrown. If anything escaped her mind for a moment, there was always something close at hand to recall it; for all her thoughts were connected in her mind with some material thing or other, so that, with her, the thing and the thought went ever together; the piano above all teemed with so many associations for her, that it wellnigh overpowered her to see it. She would

sit down to it and actually not be able to touch the keys, while, when Signe played, she could scarcely remain in the room. She liked best to be alone; and Oedegaard and Signe, understanding her feelings, kept away from her; but all about her looked at her with mournful affection, and the priest never passed her without stroking her hair.

At last the day had come. It was a damp and misty day; the snow was thawing on the mountains, the grass was showing itself green on the meadows. All four of them kept to their own rooms until it was time for them to go together to church. There was no one there except themselves, the verger, and a clergyman, for the priest himself was going to partake of the communion; but, notwithstanding, he preached the sermon, for he had some earnest words to say to the young girl about to leave them. He talked as he used to talk to them as they sat at dinner at home on a birthday or holy-day. It would soon be made plain, he said, whether the foundation that had been laid during that portion of her life which she was that day closing in prayer to God for grace was deep and secure. No man's life was perfectly true

and just till he had found his right life's-work. Hers was the calling as of a preacher, and only by truthful endeavor and worthy living could she hope to produce mighty and enduring results. God often used the unworthy, it was true; and indeed all of us, he said, were in the higher sense unworthy; but God could make use of our strivings and yearnings for goodness. There was *one* great moral goal, and no one might reach it by yearning and thinking alone; each must use his utmost endeavor to approach the Most High. He begged her to come and see them often, for, said he, the main idea of communion was that of sympathetic faith and mutual help. If ever she erred, she would always find pity and love among them, and if she herself did not see where her error was, they would always be ready with loving advice and aid.

After the holy rite they all four went home together. But the remainder of the day was spent by all in their own rooms, save that in the evening and far into the night Petra and Signe sat long together.

Next morning Petra was to go. At the table the priest took a most tender farewell of her.

He was quite of Oedegaard's opinion, he said, in thinking it best for her to begin as she now was, and to begin *alone*. But in the struggle she was now entering on she would soon find out how helpful it was to know that somewhere there were certain men and women whom she could ever feel sure of. She would see that only to know that they ever remembered her in their prayers would be of no small help to her.

Then, after thus taking leave of Petra, he turned and addressed Oedegaard.

"To be joined in love for one and the same object," he said, "is the most beautiful beginning of love for one another."

No doubt the priest had not a thought in his mind when he uttered this greeting of a certain meaning his words might bear, and which first made Signe and then Petra blush rosy red. Whether Oedegaard blushed or not they knew not, for neither of them dared to look at him.

But when the horses were at the door, and the three friends stood by the young girl, while all the men and women of the place were gathered round the carriage, Petra whispered, as she kissed Signe for the last time:

"I shall soon hear great news from you, I know. God's blessing on you!"

An hour later she could no longer see the homestead, but only the white peaks that towered above it.

CHAPTER XII

THE CURTAIN RISES

ONE evening, just before Christmas, all the tickets for the theatre in the metropolis were sold. A new actress, of whom everybody was talking, was to make her first appearance. One of the people—for her mother was a poor fish-wife—she had, by the help of some who had perceived her talents, now reached her goal, and she was supposed to have given great promise. Many strange things were being whispered about her among the audience before the curtain rose. She had been, it was said, a shockingly naughty little girl, and had, as soon as she was old enough, got herself engaged to six young men at once, and had kept it up for six months. She had, they said, been escorted out of her native town by the police, for there had been terrible disturbances because of her; it was a strange thing that the management should permit such a person to appear on the stage. Others declared there was not a word of truth in all this, for

she had been brought up ever since she was ten years old in the quiet household of a priest in Bergen. She was a cultivated and charming girl, for they knew her well. No doubt her talents were magnificent, for her beauty was superb.

But there were others sitting in the theatre who knew the real facts of the case much better.

To begin with, there was the great fish-merchant, whose name was known throughout the land —Yngve Vold. He happened to be in the town on a matter of business; though, to be sure, it was said that his fiery Spanish wife made his house so hot for him that he was forced to travel to cool himself. He had taken the largest box in the theatre all to himself, but had invited his chance acquaintances at dinner in the hotel to come with him and see "something devilish worth seeing." He was in excellent spirits, till suddenly his eye fell on—what! could it be?—there, in that box in another row, and with a whole ship's crew round him—no! —yes!—yes, indeed, it *was* Gunnar Ask! Gunnar Ask, who, by the help of his mother's money, had now become the owner and captain of "The Norwegian Constitution," had happened, as he came out of port, to sail side by side with a ship that

bore the name: "The Danish Constitution"; and when—as it seemed to Gunnar—the latter tried to get ahead of him, he was quite unable to put up with it; he crowded on all the canvas that he had; the old "Constitution" creaked, and, in the long run, in his efforts to hold her as close up to the wind and as long as possible, he ran her aground on a most ridiculously inconvenient spot. Now he lay in the town against his will, while "The Norwegian Constitution" was being patched up. He had met Petra in the town one day, and she had accosted him, and been so gracious and kind to him both then and since, that he not only forgot his grievance against her, but called himself the greatest codfish their town had ever exported for ever having been such a fool as to imagine himself fit for such a girl as Petra. He had bought tickets at high prices that day for all his crew; and now he sat there, with the firm intention of treating them after every act; and all his crew—men from Petra's native town, and of good repute in that earthly paradise, her mother's inn—felt Petra's honor to be their own; and as *they* sat there they vowed that their clapping would be such as had never been heard before.

Down in the stalls could be seen the priest's thick, bristly hair. He sat there peacefully, for he had entrusted her case to a higher one. By his side sat Signe, now Signe Oedegaard. She, with her husband and Petra, had just come back from a three months' trip abroad. There was a look of serene happiness on her face as she sat smiling over at Oedegaard. Between them sat an old woman with snow-white hair that crowned her brow like a royal diadem. Her head rose above all those around her, and she could be seen from every part of the house. Before long, every opera-glass was turned upon her, as the news spread that this was the young actress's mother. The white-haired dame made such a deep impression on the audience that its influence secured their hopeful attention for the daughter. A young nation is full of confident expectation, for it has faith in its own powers; and the sight of the mother touched and roused that faith.

She herself saw nothing and nobody; nor did she trouble much about what was going to take place. All she wanted was to be there and see whether people were kind to her daughter or not.

The time was close at hand. Conversation was

fading out in the anxious expectation which was gradually taking possession of all and silencing them.

With a sudden crash of drums, cymbals, and horns, the overture began. Adam Œhlenschläger's "Axel and Valborg" was the play, and Petra herself had asked for that overture. She sat behind in the wings listening. And in front of the curtain sat as many as the house could hold of her countrymen, trembling for her fate, as is ever the case when one expects some great thing of one's own to be brought to the light of day. Each felt as if he himself were to be put to the test; and at such moments there goes up many a prayer, even from hearts not used to praying.

Gently the overture began to die down. Peace fell upon the harmonies, and they softly melted away as if beneath the rays of the sun. The music ceased, deepest stillness reigned, and the curtain rose.

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